VIENNESE LOVE

HUGO BETTAUER

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By HUGO BETTAUER

Translated from the German by
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[DIE FREUDLOSE GASSE]

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VIENNESE LOVE

Chapter 1—Fifty-five Melchiorgasse

NO. 55 MELCHIORGASSE—Melchior Lane—in the seventh district of Vienna, dates from the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth: in other words, it was built at a time when owning house property was a profession. A man was a landlord, just as others were lawyers or manufacturers. Of all the drones who throve in a great city like Vienna, the landlord was the strongest and the most brutal. In other towns a house was just a safe investment for capital; in Vienna it was often the owner's sole source of income. The largest possible profit had to be made out of the house—that is to say, bad material used for the building, every square inch of space saved, the cheapest stoves put in, which would not give any heat, rooms made as small as possible to the exclusion of light and air, and holes hardly big enough for larders turned into bedrooms. The modern comforts that other cities possess did not and do not exist in Vienna—or, at any rate, are re-

stricted to a few dozen palatial blocks of flats, which are out of the question except for really wealthy people.

No. 55 Melchiorgasse was a typical Viennese tenement house of more recent date, with gloomy passages, pitch-dark anterooms, bathrooms tucked away in corners, shabby sham elegance, and a façade covered with disgusting, coarsely-daubed lime and mortar ornamentation.

One evening in late autumn, when it was already quite dark, a tall, powerfully-built man entered this house. He had turned up the collar of his smart, ultra-modern English ulster so high—to protect himself, perhaps, against the damp fog—that it covered his black pointed beard and the lower part of his face. He rushed two steps at a time up the stairs to the mezzanine, opened a door bearing the name Barbara Merkel, crossed the pitch-dark hall and stopped hesitatingly before a small door which led to the kitchen of the flat.

"Frau Merkel!" he called in a low, strained voice, which he seemed to be trying to disguise.

A fat slovenly woman with a projecting stomach opened the door, and a smell of rancid fat assailed the visitor's nostrils.

"Everything is ready, Herr Doktor. I've put clean sheets on the bed and a clean pillow-case, too. But if you don't mind my mentioning it, Herr Doktor,

washing is so dear nowadays, and I thought I might ask you to pay a little more."

"All right, I'll let you have it on the first," grumbled the man, who had remained standing in the dark hall. "I only wanted to say that, when the bell rings twice, I'll open the door myself, and you are not to show yourself."

"Very good, Herr Doktor, you can trust me absolutely. So many ladies have been in and out of my flat that I don't take any notice of any of them, and if ever I've met one of them on the stairs I've looked the other way. Discretion is a point of honor with me. That was what the last gentleman before you—some sort of official in the Finance Ministry—used to like so much. He always used to come with a lawyer's wife from the Inner City—I can't recollect the name now, I shall think of it in a moment and——"

The tall man with the pointed beard cut short the discreet landlady's flow of words and was about to withdraw. Frau Merkel called after him:

"Please, Herr Doktor, you'll go before ten, won't you? If you don't, that beast of a housekeeper 'll go straight to the Housing Office and report me, and they'll requisition my room or turn me out altogether."

"All right, we'll have gone by ten, as we agreed."

The gentleman at last retreated to the room he

had taken, switched on the light, locked the door behind him, and then, after carefully removing his coat and hat, began as carefully to get rid of his false pointed beard in front of the large mirror. Without pince-nez or beard, it would have required at any rate a very astute detective to recognize in him the man who had entered the flat a short time before. He had on a dress-coat and patent-leather shoes, and had a very distinguished air; even if the pearl studs in his shirt-front appeared to be false.

He thrust the beard and pince-nez into the big pockets of his ulster; then he lit the small gas-stove in one corner of the large, shoddily-furnished room; lit a cigarette and began to walk up and down impatiently. His wrinkled forehead, the nervous way in which he chewed his long well-trimmed fingernails, his tightly-pressed lips, suggested mental disturbance and painful thoughts.

The noise of a motor-car became audible. The man opened the door, went out into the dark hall and listened. Then the bell pealed sharply, twice; the beardless man opened the flat door, whispered a word of greeting, took the woman who entered by the arm and led her into the room. Frau Merkel, who was looking through the keyhole of the kitchen door, could, to her disappointment, see nothing whatever of the strange lady, and went back to her cooking-pots.

The slender young woman flung back her valuable chinchilla fur cloak.

"I got quite hot with fear," she said, "when I got out of the cab and ran up the stairs. I only pray that no one saw me!"

She unwound the thick veil from her little gold hat, let the fur cloak slip from her shoulders to the carpet and stood before him in all her young beauty. She threw her bare arms round his neck. Her black silk dress, embroidered with gold, fell in soft folds from her snow-white shoulders to her black silk sandals. Flesh-colored silk stockings encased her slender, well-shaped legs, which had the appearance of being bare.

She possessed that strange half-Eastern beauty which has a stimulating, exciting effect on susceptible men. Abundant coal-black hair framed an oval face, whose ivory complexion was in sharp, but all the more effective, contrast to the scarlet-tinted lips and the moist gray eyes. Her youthful body was slim, but well-developed; her plump white arms had something girlish about them, and at the same time a suggestion of lasciviousness and unchastity.

Wild, burning kisses and cooing laughter; then the woman released herself from the embrace.

"Be careful, we mustn't make ourselves untidy. I must be at the Rosenows' in two hours at the latest. My husband thinks I'm at the Opera. He

was very much hurt because I took only one seat and am going alone. But I told him I simply must hear Jeritza in *La Tosca.*"

"Won't he call there for you?"

"No; I told him I should probably leave after the second act in order not to be so late at the Rosenows' as I should be if I stayed to the end. He promised to be at the Rosenows' himself at nine, and to excuse me if by any chance I should come later. You must be there, too, by half-past nine at the latest, of course; people would notice it if we both arrived after supper had begun."

The young woman had now taken off her long and valuable pearl necklace, her glittering bracelets, and her rings, which contained emeralds and diamonds as large as hazel-nuts. The man drew her to him.

"Quick!" he said, "let us make all the use we can of the short time we have."

Blushing, she glided to the door and switched off the light.

* * * * *

The man with the pointed beard, pince-nez and turned-up coat-collar, opened the kitchen door a chink. Frau Merkel, sitting by the fire, woke from her doze with a start.

"It's nine o'clock, Frau Merkel; I am going now. The lady will rest a little while longer, but she will

be gone, too, before ten. We shall come again in a few days."

"Good evening, Herr Doktor. I'm sure I shall give you satisfaction. You can be sure of finding everything clean and of there being no talk. A manufacturer from Mariahilf who took my room—you know, the man who owns the furniture factory—used always to come with Mizzi Lorian from the Raimund Theatre, and he said——"

The man did not learn what the manufacturer had said, for he was already hurrying downstairs into the street, whose darkness enveloped him.

Chapter 2—The Great Supper

THERE was a party at Generaldirektor Rosenow's. Over a hundred guests had been invited to supper. The palatial villa in the Pötzleinsdorfer Allee was aglow with electric chandeliers, while the arc lamps in the grounds surrounding the villa flung a bluish light which illuminated the whole neighborhood for a hundred yards in every direction. One motor-car after another drove up to the front gate, before which two men-servants in livery received the guests. A third man-servant conducted them up the steps, covered in for the occasion, to the villa, where maids relieved them of their furs and overcoats. Generaldirektor Jonas Rosenow welcomed his guests in the great hall—fidgetily, excitedly, jovially, reverently or facetiously according to the guest's identity—and led them to a table on which every gentleman and every lady found his or her name-card. Then they went into the principal drawing-room, furnished in Empire style, where Frau Rosenow was doing the honors.

The fat little lady with the round kindly face found it no easy task. From time to time she cast an imploring look at the tall, thin woman at her side, who came to her aid. This was the widowed Countess Stuppach, now companion in the Rosenows' household.

As lately as 1918 Generaldirektor Rosenow had been called Rosenstrauch and had owned a small money-changer's office in the Taborstrasse, where also lottery and theater tickets were sold and some pawnbroking was done. But the little fellow had a keen eye for the possibilities of the time. He grew richer daily. He bought houses and land and sold them again with fabulous skill. Soon he migrated from the Pazmanitengasse, where he had lived since he moved into town from Bielitz, to the palace in the Pötzleinsdorfer Allee; founded, with some associates, the Central European Bank, of which he became managing-director; and now, at the instigation of his daughter Regina, who quite lately had been singing Leopoldi and Wiesenthal's latest hit, "Yes, We Have No Bananas," to the gentlemen who sat round her in the little bourgeois drawing-room, he was giving his first big party. The slim vivacious girl, who excelled her parents in stature as much as in education and intellect, had, in inviting the guests, cleverly scattered a dozen authors, painters,

musicians, and even a journalist among the eminences of the banking and financial world.

The journalist in question, Otto Demel, a member of the staff of the *Vienna Herald,* was at the moment in the Turkish smoking-room surrounded by men, anxious to hear the latest news from Germany. Demel, one of the cleverest *causeurs* in Viennese journalism, feared for his malicious jests, but popular with his readers for the thoroughness with which he explained and elucidated daily happenings, gave them the news in brief and then asked humorously:

"Well, what about it? Will the Stock Exchange be weak or firm to-morrow? Shall I become a billionaire with my twenty-five Eos shares, or must I die a poor man?"

Nathan Grosskopf, a bald, asthmatic giant, who was estimated to be worth some hundreds of billions, replied with a shrug of the shoulders:

"If a man of your gifts and intellect is not yet a billionaire, it only proves that intellect and shrewdness are two quite different things. But, if you will allow me, I'll buy a hundred Alpines for you to-morrow."

"I won't allow you, which certainly does not prove that I have intellect, but does prove that I am not shrewd. You have no idea, gentlemen, how pleasant

it feels to be the only one among so many shrewd men who possesses only intellect and no money."

Grosskopf and several other men smiled a trifle contemptuously and went out of the room, leaving the journalist with Dr. Leid, a solicitor, and Egon Stirner, an employee of the Central European Bank, a tall, slightly-built man, hardly thirty years old. Otto Demel had noticed that Dr. Leid was looking at his watch at intervals of scarcely a minute. He was pale, visibly tired and overstrained. His business was considered the most flourishing of its kind in Vienna. Demel laid an arm about his shoulder and said jokingly:

"And where is your charming wife? I'll bet you're so nervous only because you haven't got her beside you all the time! My dear fellow, you've been married three years now—it's high time the honeymoon came to an end."

The solicitor parried the jest in some embarrassment.

"Lia is at the Opera," he said, " at *La Tosca,* and she promised to come away after the second act. It would be awkward if her place at the table was empty and then she came in half-way through supper."

Egon Stirner laughed loudly.

"Awkward? It would be awkward for a man! But for a beautiful young woman—for her it is a

perfectly glorious feeling to enter a crowded room and know that all eyes are turned on her."

"Not a bad piece of observation," Demel said. "Decidedly you have a knowledge of women, Herr Stirner. From what I know of your charming wife, Leid, it will really be the height of enjoyment for her to sweep into the supper-room in all her majestic beauty."

Leid's face wore a flattered smile, but the corners of his mouth twitched. Had anyone, even his best friend, Otto Demel, an idea how he loved Lia and how anxious he was about her? Did anyone know anything of the torments he endured when he felt how Lia inwardly was growing more and more remote from him—how she was as cold as ice in his arms, bored, weary and ill-humored in his company, but, at the approach of other men, gave a free rein to her ardent temperament?

The gently muffled sound of the gong summoned the guests from the twenty or more rooms to the dining-room, where two long tables shimmered snow-white under a load of gold, silver and crystal.

Dr. Leid made sure that his wife had still not arrived, and hurried up to the hostess to apologize.

"What a dreadful pity!" Frau Sabine Rosenow lamented, "what a dreadful pity! Her food will get cold."

For the moment she was no longer the rich man's

wife, but the worthy materfamilias from Bielitz, horrified at the idea of her husband Jonas or her little daughter Regi getting cold soup. Countess Stuppach's gray hair stood on end at the remark, but she saved the situation. She smiled urbanely and said:

"Frau Generaldirektor is only joking. Your wife is welcome, Herr Doktor, whenever she comes. Of course, guests who are late will have supper when they arrive."

The little string orchestra in the gallery of the large dining-room, furnished in old English style, began to play; the servants, gliding about in rubber-soled shoes, handed the dainty dishes noiselessly, and the guests ate, drank and talked less noiselessly. Ruby-red, greenish-yellow and golden-yellow wines sparkled in the glasses.

In vain Dr. Leid endeavored to talk to his neighbor. There should have been no lack of material for conversation, seeing that he had secured the lady a painless divorce three times in the course of a smaller number of years. But he was distrait; his eyes turned continually towards the empty chair opposite where his wife should have been sitting, and his thoughts went back to the time when he had fallen in love with Lia.

He was forty and she twenty; he was a busy solicitor with an enormous income for a man of his

profession; she a poor typist of obscure Jewish family who had secured a post in his office through patronage.

As a rule, Dr. Leid came in contact only with his numerous male clerks; he used hardly to glance at his women employees as he went through the secretaries' room. But one day he happened to come back after the office was shut to dictate one more letter that he had forgotten. Everyone had gone except the new typist, Lia Holzer, and she, too, was just preparing to leave. Dr. Leid dictated the letter to her straight on to the machine, and, not wishing the charwoman to hear, bent down towards her. He inhaled the scent of her hair, saw the swelling contours of her girlish figure—he lost the thread and, breathing hard, left off dictating. And as she sat up straight and gave him a questioning look, her satin smooth cheek touched his face, his eyes met her eyes —large and moist, but thinly concealing the temperament of an ardent young woman.

Not many days passed before this trivial incident bore fruit. Within a month Lia Holzer left the solicitor's office, as her chief's *fiancée*. Soon the wedding took place, and weeks followed during which Dr. Leid felt himself a young man again, and believed that the greatest happiness in the world had been vouchsafed to him. If ever he was assailed by doubts on the score of the great difference in age

between himself and his wife, he dispelled them with plausible arguments. His position in life, his absolute devotion to Lia, and, not least, his wealth would make up for that. And then Lia would give him children, and her motherhood would be an indissoluble bond between them.

But Lia had no children and did not want any. Instead, she flung herself into the whirlpool of social life, danced of an afternoon at the Trocadero, the Bristol grill-room, or the Tabarin, while he was working at the office; sulked when he came home dead tired of an evening, and did not want to go out; yawned when he told her of his professional experiences; left the good books he brought her lying about unread, and had nothing in her pretty little head but clothes, tea-parties, motor drives, theaters and balls.

Was she unfaithful to him? Leid quivered with anger at the thought. Ridiculous! She flirted like all women did, played the coquette even more than others, but betray him—no, he had no reason whatever for thinking that. Certainly, this fellow, Egon Stirner, whom he did not care for, had been a good deal in her company of late, and only yesterday evening at the Imperial, where the three of them had dined together, he had felt that the two were exchanging significant glances. But no, it was a flirtation and nothing more. And from a flirtation to

adultery was a long step, which his Lia would never take.

Where was she? She should have arrived by now even if she had stayed to the end of the performance. His neighbor consoled him. "Jeritza will have had to come before the curtain twenty times after each act," she said. "The performance is sure not to be over till ten."

The first speech was made. An ex-Minister, now on the board of the Central European Bank, stammered out his few sentences in a monotonous voice. He compared Jonas Rosenow to a rising star, and his wife to a violet which prefers to bloom unseen but smells all the sweeter—at which the journalist made terrible grimaces in order not to burst out laughing.

The master of the house replied, perspiring with emotion. When he declared how highly he appreciated the honor of seeing such distinguished guests assembled at his princely table, Countess Stuppach almost fainted. Demel could no longer restrain himself and laughed out loud, and even Dr. Leid forgot his gloomy thoughts and smiled delightedly at the friend who sat opposite him and ought to have taken his wife in to supper.

But his nervous anxiety again laid hold on him. It was half-past ten, and still Lia had not come. It could not be explained on normal grounds; something must have happened. Perhaps she was not well; per-

haps a fire had broken out in the Opera House. He recollected the fire at the Ring Theater, of which his parents had so often told him. He could control himself no longer; he jumped up and left the dining-room with a muttered word of apology to the lady next him, to hurry to the telephone and ring up his flat. No, Frau Leid was not at home. She had gone to the opera in full evening dress, in her new black silk dress embroidered with gold, and from there she was to have gone straight on to Pötzleinsdorf.

Leid rang off impatiently. When he returned to the dining-room, drops of perspiration stood on his high, intellectual forehead. And now his uneasiness began to infect the other guests. Everyone began asking him where his wife could be. A few men whispered irreverent gibes to one another, and women smiled mockingly rather than sympathetically. But Otto Demel now became genuinely anxious, while pretty Frau Lia's latest cavalier, Egon Stirner, was visibly perturbed.

Eleven o'clock. Thanks to the liberal consumption of wine, the conversation in the room had become so noisy that the music could scarcely be heard. People stood up without apology to toast persons sitting some way off, a few glasses of champagne were spilt, while shrill cries in a minor key told the expert that ribaldry and eroticism were claiming their

rights. But Leid sat pale as death, paralyzed, riddled by the inquisitive looks of his fellow-guests.

Otto Demel went up to him and put his arm about his shoulder.

"I'll ring up the paper," he said; "perhaps something has happened at the Opera which has delayed the end of the performance. It's quite possible that one of the singers was taken ill, or that the safety curtain wouldn't work, or something of the kind."

It was some time before Demel returned. He smilingly reassured his friend.

"The opera was, as a matter of fact, over very late, because Jeritza had to come before the curtain so many times. In any case your wife ought to have been here by now. But it's quite clear to me now what has happened. Lia did not want to come in right at the end of supper, and has gone off with friends to have a quick meal somewhere. You'll see, she'll be here in a minute."

He continued in a louder voice, so that people standing farther off could hear, too:

"The night editor tells me there has been a most mysterious and interesting murder. Soon aften ten o'clock the body of a very beautiful young woman was found in a disreputable flat in the Melchiorgasse. It is concluded from her black silk, gold-embroidered dress and her chinchilla fur cloak that

she belonged to the best society. Nothing more is known so far."

Dr. Leid had leapt to his feet. Like a man dreaming he repeated the words: "Black silk, gold-embroidered dress, chinchilla fur——" Then he gave a piercing shriek, "It's Lia!" and fell down in a faint.

Chapter 3—Murder!

THERE was a panic in the great dining-room. The orchestra stopped short with a shrill tearing noise, piercing shrieks resounded, and all crowded towards the solicitor, who lay insensible on the carpet, so that the journalist and a doctor who was among the guests had difficulty in reaching Dr. Leid. He was carried into another room, while the guests formed excited groups and discussed the fearful occurrence with cries and gesticulations.

Women had turned very pale under their rouge. Dark staircases and rooms with closely-drawn curtains rose before their eyes; they saw themselves, veiled and terrified, hurrying along dirty, untidy streets in a fever of nervousness, as though pursued by Furies. Men spoke in whispers of the corruption of the time, and cast at their wives timid, embarrassed glances, wherein lay the unspoken question, "You, too?"

Dr. Leid had recovered consciousness in the bedroom to which he had been carried. He lay there

aged by ten years, resigned, silent, broken. Demel bent over him and endeavored to console him.

"Perhaps you are mistaken, perhaps it is not her! You know nothing for certain yet."

Leid waved him away with a weary gesture.

"It is her, I know it is. Poor Lia, I was too old for her, too old and serious. She needed fire and flame, and I am an extinct volcano. Demel, my dear fellow, go to the place and see that no harm is done to her body. I feel much better now, and I will wait for you at the Bristol; I shall take a room there. I will never enter my house again."

Profoundly distressed, Demel turned away to execute his friend's wish. He would, for that matter, have hastened to the scene of the murder even if Leid had not asked him to do so, for the journalist was always awake in him, the chronicler and observer of tendencies, to whom such a murder as this seemed alike symbolic and mysterious.

As Otto Demel was getting into one of the cars in readiness for the guests to drive to the Melchiorgasse, Egon Stirner forced his way to his side.

"Please take me with you! I can't find words to say how distressed I am. That nice, pretty, jolly woman—only yesterday I was dining with her and Dr. Leid at the Imperial, and to-day—no, it doesn't bear thinking about."

The car was already whizzing down the Währingerstrasse. The journalist asked absent-mindedly:

"Do you know the Leids well?"

"Know them well? I got to know her a few weeks ago at the Krieau, a beautiful September day, with our managing director and his wife, and I have met them now and again since. Most often, as a matter of fact, Frau Lia, for she was very fond of dancing and was always to be found of an afternoon at the Pavillon, the Tabarin or the Bristol. And as I like dancing myself, I often spent an hour in her company."

"Well, then, if the murdered woman should really be Frau Lia, perhaps you could contribute something towards catching the murderer. The circle in which he is to be looked for cannot be so very large. He is sure to be a man who, superficially at least, is in society—a man who has danced with her, as you have."

The car turned sharply into the Schwärzspanierstrasse, and a minute must have passed before Stirner replied, hesitatingly:

"Being a pretty woman, of course, she was always surrounded by a whole crowd of men. I know some of them, but many were foreigners, whose names I don't even know. And then, as a rule, women keep their secrets well——"

The motor-car had reached the Melchiorgasse and

stopped before No. 55, outside which, in spite of the lateness of the hour, a large crowd had assembled.

The journalist murmured uneasily:

"The Chief of the Police is here. I know his car. He would be, of course; after all, it is a sensational case."

The bank employee took leave of the journalist outside the shut front door, over which two policemen kept watch.

"I have no business here. I'll go to the Café Payr, and I would be very grateful if you would look in there afterwards. You can imagine that I am more than anxious."

Demel nodded, and on showing his journalist's pass was at once admitted to the house and to Frau Merkel's flat. Soon he was in the room where the murder had been committed.

The body lay on the sofa and was now covered with a linen cloth. Round the table sat the Chief of Police, the head of the Security Police, Hofrat Schmitz, a clerk, and the police doctor, while Frau Merkel, her eyes swollen with weeping, stood by the table between two detectives.

Demel greeted the police officials, whom he knew well, and said quickly:

"I have come not only in my professional capacity, but in the hope that I might perhaps be

able to give some information. Has the murdered woman been identified?"

"No," Hofrat Schmitz replied. "She is without doubt a society woman; her expensive clothes and fur cloak prove that. Her handkerchief has the initials L. L. on it, but we know nothing more at present."

Demel drew a deep breath.

"That's enough," he said, "if you will let me have one look at the poor lady I will tell you who she is."

At a sign from the Chief of Police one of the officials turned back the cloth. And there lay before the journalist—almost naked—the body of Lia Leid. Her mouth was open as though attempting to scream, her hands raised in self-defense, her burning eyes faded, a picture of misery and horror, yet beautiful even in death.

Demel bowed his head before the dead body and folded his hands as though in prayer. Then, pale as death, he turned to the officials again:

"Gentlemen, the murdered woman is Frau Lia Leid, the wife of my friend Dr. Karl Leid, the solicitor, whom you, too, know well."

The Chief of Police and Hofrat uttered a cry of horror. The Chief of Police murmured, with a glance at the head of the Security Police:

"This is fearful! All Vienna will be in a ferment.

We must find the murderer quickly at all costs." He said to one of his subordinates: "See that a reward of ten million crowns to the person who catches the murderer is announced everywhere the first thing in the morning."

Demel smiled skeptically. The same old methods, he thought, the good old sterotyped plans. As if, in a case like this, the murderer had had accomplices who might betray him! He added, aloud:

"May I ask what has been discovered so far?"

"Certainly; perhaps you may even be able to give us many valuable hints. Frau Merkel, you've howled quite enough; kindly tell us all you know over again, making a connected story of it. I might mention, Herr Demel, that Frau Merkel makes a practice of letting one room of her flat, which consists of two rooms and a kitchen, as a place for assignations. Well, we won't say too much about that, so go on, Frau Merkel."

Frau Barbara Merkel, sensing a certain benevolence in the last words of the Chief of Police, dried her tears once for all and began a rambling narrative of how she, as a poor widow, was compelled to let her largest room to people of quality for occasional use. She had advertised in the *Tageblatt* the Sunday before, recommending her charmingly furnished room for free and undisturbed use by ladies and gentlemen. Only the day before, that was

Wednesday, late in the evening, a tall gentleman had come to see her about the room. She knew nothing about him except that he wore a pince-nez and had a black pointed beard. She could not see him clearly, for when she turned on the light in the dark hall he had turned it off himself and said that he did not wish to be seen.

"I wasn't surprised at that," Frau Merkel continued, "for most of the ladies and gentlemen who seek a discreet place behave nervously, as he did. Then I showed the gentleman the room, but he didn't go into it, but looked at it from the dark hall. Then he asked what the price of the room was, because he wanted to have it for himself only, although he would use it not more than twice a week, in the afternoon. Well, gentlemen, I'm a poor, respectable widow, and as things are so dear nowadays, I said a million * a month. The gentleman paid at once, and I gave him the keys of the flat and the room. But I told him that if he didn't want to get himself reported to the police, he and his lady must go away before the front door was shut at ten o'clock. I'm a respectable woman and won't allow any improprieties in my house."

The tragedy of the situation did not prevent all

* During the Austrian inflation a million crowns or kronen were worth approximately ten dollars.

the men in the room, from the Chief of Police to the detectives, from smiling at these words.

"Well, what happened to-day?" asked the Chief of Police.

"At about seven this evening the gentleman came; I didn't see him, for he only spoke to me through a chink of the kitchen door. He said his lady would be coming soon, and would ring twice, and he would open the door himself, and I mustn't dare to look out. As he had said, soon there were two rings, and he took the lady into the room. I looked through the keyhole, because I couldn't help being curious, but it was dark in the hall and I couldn't see anything. About nine the gentleman went away, and called to me in the kitchen through the chink of the door that the lady was going to rest a little while longer, but would go away before ten. I waited; half-past nine came, a quarter to ten, and there wasn't a movement. At a few minutes to ten I went to the door of the room and knocked, but I got no answer. I knocked again and again, and at last banged on the door with my fist, but there wasn't a movement. I was frightened and went to the housekeeper; she fetched a policeman, and the locksmith from the house next door came in at the same time."

Frau Merkel began to sob again.

"The strange gentleman must have locked the

door behind him and taken the key away. But the locksmith was able to open it at once with a hook. It was dark in the room, and when I turned the light on I nearly dropped down dead with fright, for there on the bed lay the body."

Frau Merkel was now allowed to stand down, and the Chief of Police gave the journalist further explanatory details.

"The police doctor, Dr. Schimmel, was here at half-past ten, the time we came ourselves. Please give us the result of your observations once more, Dr. Schimmel."

The doctor stroked his graying beard, took up a sheet of paper covered with scribbled notes, and said:

"I found the body of a woman of approximately twenty-two to twenty-five years of age. Death could not have taken place earlier than two hours before, or later than an hour and a half before, i.e. between 9 and 9:30 p.m. Death was without doubt caused by violence, by strangulation. A strong hand seems to have crushed the woman's windpipe without any previous struggle. That was all I could ascertain as the result of a superficial examination."

"What is your theory?" the journalist asked after a pause.

Hofrat Schmitz began to speak.

"It seems most likely that the murder was the

act of a pervert, though previous experience shows that murderers of this type usually shed blood, and in this case it was not so. The little gold bag, which was doubtless the murdered woman's property, was lying on the table here. As only a lace handkerchief was found in it, but no money at all, the theory that robbery was the motive is also admissible. Though I cannot imagine that a lady would carry about with her sums of a magnitude which would justify so elaborate and premeditated a murder as this."

One of the subordinate officials, a man, still young, with intelligent features and good manners, stepped forward, cleared his throat, and said:

"If I may be allowed to make an observation, a lady who wears such expensive furs and clothes, and, as Herr Demel told us, was to have gone to a big evening party, is sure to have been wearing jewelry. But not a single piece of jewelry was found on the body!"

The Chief of the Police and the Hofrat nodded approvingly, and the latter said:

"Quite right, Herr Horak, a good piece of observation. We must find out to-day from the murdered woman's servants what jewelry she had on her."

"Her wonderful pearl necklace, for a certainty!" Demel declared with animation. "Dr. Leid, who comes of a very rich family, inherited it from his mother and she from a great-aunt—who had been

very beautiful and brought the pearls home from England as a gift from an Indian prince. The necklace consisted of large and choice pearls. A few months ago a jeweler valued it at a hundred thousand dollars, the equivalent of seven billion crowns. Besides that, Frau Leid used to wear other very valuable jewelry, which her husband had given her during their married life."

The Chief of Police and the head of the Security Police whispered together; then the latter declared that the theory first held must be abandoned. It must be ascertained as quickly as possible what jewelry and money Frau Leid had had with her. This was soon done, for in the meantime the detective, Horak, without waiting for instructions, had had Frau Leid's maid fetched by car from the Leid's flat in the Arenbergring. The girl, on seeing her mistress's body, almost fainted and began to sob wildly, but when she had calmed down a little she told that when Frau Lia Leid left the house a little before seven in a taxicab, she had on not only the pearl necklace, but almost all her other jewelry, including an extremely valuable diamond ring, a ring containing an emerald of extraordinary size, a butterfly consisting of eighty fine stones, several pins, and a bracelet which Dr. Leid had bought for her birthday present for 300,000 crowns. When she had asked her mistress if this was not too much jewelry to

wear all at once, Frau Doktor had laughed and replied: "But, Marie, have you any idea what fine people go to the Rosenows'? Besides, someone who is very fond of me likes me to wear a lot of jewelry."

The men exchanged significant glances, and the head of the Security Police began to cross-examine the maid.

"You must tell us the truth," he said, "you must conceal nothing. Your unfortunate mistress has been murdered by a scoundrel, and we are all most anxious to catch him. Every word you say may be of vital importance."

Marie wept bitterly into her handkerchief.

"My poor mistress, she was always so cheerful and pleasant. And my master, I'm sorrier still for him, he loved her so much. Ask me what you like, I'll tell you everything I know."

"Good, that is sensible of you. Well, then, did you notice anything remarkable about Frau Leid's behavior to-day?"

"Now, after this has happened, it does strike me that before Frau Leid left the house she scented herself more than usual and was in more of a hurry. She didn't mind, as a rule, whether she went to the Opera half an hour late or not. But to-day she was in a regular bustle."

"Do you think the lady had at all a large sum of money with her?"

Marie reflected for a moment.

"Yes, certainly. Our car is being repaired, so Frau Leid had to take a taxi, and at the last moment she opened her bag once more to see if she had small change. As she did so, I saw a whole roll of 500,000 crown notes in the bag."

"Now, think carefully before you answer. Do you know whether Frau Leid has had relations with any man recently, and if so, with whom? I see you will not like answering, but it is the most important point of all. Frau Leid has been murdered in an obscure place of accommodation, in this very room, by a man. That man must have been her lover. Do you know who it could have been?"

Marie wept again. Then she said decidedly:

"My poor mistress! If she has done wrong, she has paid for it with her life. Well—I don't think my mistress took her marriage vows very seriously. I have been with her since she and Dr. Leid were married, that is, for three years. It began three years ago. The first was a Russian engineer, who has gone back to Moscow; and then it was a Rumanian attaché. He was her lover for nearly a year, and when he went away to Paris my mistress cried a great deal. After that a singer, Herr Kurmann, quite a young man, often came to the house. I don't know

whether there was anything serious between them, but they used to kiss; I have seen them. When Frau Leid went to Westerland in the summer, she said to me, laughing: 'Marie, I'm glad I'm getting rid of Kurmann, he's as stupid as tenors always are. Really, he's not much more entertaining than my husband!' "

The police official smiled, highly amused, but Demel bit his lips till they nearly bled. It was thus that the wife had talked of her deceived husband and her lover before her maid! Was it not typical of the morality of these modern women, who had risen too quickly from the ghetto, the harem, concubinage? He shuddered inwardly and thought, "Thank God I am not married!"

"Well, and recently?" Hofrat Schmitz insisted.

"After Westerland my mistress went to Rimini, and only came back a month ago. During that time I knew of nobody; no one came to the house, and, of course, I can't know who my mistress met in other places."

"We'll have a closer look at this singer Kurmann," the Chief of Police said irritably.

"Quite unnecessary," Demel interposed. "I know Kurmann; he's a harmless fellow, and was singing Stolzing in the *Meistersinger* for the first time tonight. The opera lasts from seven till after eleven."

It was almost one o'clock when the Chief of

Police declared the session at an end. In the early hours of the morning a search was made for finger-prints, and a whole pack of the ablest detectives let loose on the murderer's heels.

"You will take charge, Herr Horak."

Demel hurried to the Café Payr, rushed into the telephone-box, rapidly dictated his paper an account of the affair, supplementing the police reports, and then narrated his experiences to the bank employee, Egon Stirner, who was eagerly awaiting him. He did not, however, give away the unfortunate woman's love secrets, which her maid had revealed. The two men sat for a time in the *café,* silent, each buried in his own thoughts, and the journalist involuntarily reflected, as he looked round him:

"What ghastly fates are in store for these painted girls with their forced laughter—slipping ever farther down the ladder of life in the struggle for silk stockings and the appearance of prosperity, till one day they disappear into the abyss, and are swallowed up in the morass!"

Chapter 4—A Family on the Downward Grade

THE development of Vienna has proceeded inorganically, without aim or object. Vienna must be the only great city which has no business district, no residential quarter, but is simply a higgledy-piggledy of villas, blocks of luxurious flats, palaces, tenement houses, hovels, barracks and soldiers' quarters. In the same street millionaires and proletarians live; low houses, centuries old, with gardens, stand alongside showy, shoddy buildings of five floors with lifts and steam heating; seventeenth-century palaces jostle revolting modern tenement houses containing one or two-roomed flats for poor people.

In this respect the Melchiorgasse is typical of the whole city. In it live market porters and vegetable sellers, in old houses with enormous yards and stables at the back, whence they emerge with their carts at two in the morning to go to market; princely motor-cars roll up to the lofty closed portals of

feudal, if outwardly unassuming palaces; it contains houses built as a speculation in the bubble period and modern office buildings with no living accommodation.

Just opposite No. 55, in which the murder had been committed, three houses representing three worlds stand cheek by jowl. One is a little house, almost level with the earth, with tiny windows through which one could step comfortably from the street, if they were not always tightly shut, and next to it a house of four stories, the product of pitiless avarice and lust for profits. On each floor are eight flats, with a common lavatory and a waste pipe in the corridor. Each flat consists only of a gloomy kitchen and a bedroom adjoining it. Kitchen and bedroom alike are full of human beings, sleeping in rickety old beds of brown pinewood, on straw mattresses and broken-down sofas. These are the houses which in time of peace yielded the landlord as much as 15 per cent on his capital—more than twice as much as the houses inhabited by the well-to-do.

On passing through the main entrance of the little house next to it a surprising view meets the eye. The visitor enters a large square courtyard with an old draw-well, no longer working, and a chestnut tree. The courtyard is flanked to left and right by doors and windows, which give access to small but not

uncomfortable-looking dwelling-houses. And on leaving the courtyard by a back entrance through a second doorway, one comes into another courtyard, and from it into a third. Everywhere are dwellings, workshops, stables, wet washing hung out to dry, geraniums and stocks in broken pots on the window-sills, noisy talk, hammering, music from hoarse gramophones, crying children, quarrelling, now and again a piercing shriek, the thud of heavy blows, coarse laughter, or a sentimental song with an obscene refrain. It is a little town in itself, an entire quarter of poverty and social backwardness.

The four-storied house with the miserable flats bears the number 54, the little house with the many courtyards is 56, and next to it is No. 58, which represents yet another type. It dates from the 'sixties of the nineteenth century, a time when houses were still very strongly built; the rooms are large and lofty, the kitchens spacious, the Dutch-tile stoves broad and comfortable. So thick and massive were the walls in those times that these houses had not been able to profit by the development of gas lighting, because it would hardly have been possible to put in the pipes. Not till a short time before the war had the landlord, who belonged to an old Viennese family and had a little feeling for his tenants, had electric light installed.

Each of the three floors contained three flats only,

and each had three living-rooms, one of them very large, a spacious kitchen with a servant's room adjoining it, a storeroom opening into the hall and a disproportionately big lavatory. The names on the doors showed that the new era had not made its entrance here. A retired major-general, a Hofrat in the Ministry of Communications, a pensioned departmental chief, a scholar holding no appointment, and a University professor—these were the visibly respectable inhabitants of a house which seemed to exhale prosperity of a modest kind. The carking poverty which reigned behind those stout walls, the hopeless despair of the tenants in face of a development which none were equipped to meet, were known only to the initiated—best of all to the old porter and his kind, loquacious wife, both of whom had witnessed with horror the descent of the occupants of the house, in a space of less than ten years, into an abyss of misery. Every time the dealer in antiques fetched away from one of the flats a Persian carpet, a *bourgeois* set of ornaments, a curious grandfather clock, a picture or even a box of books, the porter heaved a deep sigh, thrust his brown thumb into the bowl of his pipe, and said to his wife:

"There are hungry people in this house, old woman."

One evening a slim girl went into the flat on the

top, or third floor whose door-plate bore the name "Alois von Rumfort, k.k.[1] Regierungsrat." The "von" had now been crossed out, so had the "k.k.," and the word "retired" had been appended in ink. But even so, the inscription was not correct, for Regierungsrat Alois Rumfort had been dead for a year.

It was a wretched autumn day, wet and cold; the large, soft snowflakes were turned into water before they could reach the ground, and the girl was dripping wet. Although she had taken off her shoes on the ragged mat outside the flat door, she made little pools on the floor of the hall and then of the living-room, where all the members of the family were assembled.

Four pairs of eyes were turned expectantly and eagerly towards the girl as she entered the room with a low-toned, tired word of greeting. A tall old gentleman, with snow-white hair, bushy eyebrows and ruddy cheeks, leaned against the unheated stove; at the round table a pale middle-aged woman with careworn features and rather red eyes sat bent over her sewing, while a boy of eleven and a girl of thirteen were occupied with school work. All four looked anxious as Grete entered the room.

Grete anticipated their questions. As she took off

[1] Imperial and Royal.

her wet black coat and her shabby, shapeless, dripping hat; she said with a smile:

"Thank goodness, I've got a month's salary in advance. Six hundred thousand. It's to be deducted from my salary at the rate of a hundred thousand a month." She added, with a sigh: "It wasn't an easy job! Herr Wöss is a cad!"

Grete took the six banknotes from a worn black-leather wallet, laid four of them on the table and said hesitatingly:

"Now, I'll get something decent for supper, and bring some wood; this room is freezing cold. I'll go to Frau Greifer next door, too, and give her the fifty thousand I still owe her."

Frau Rumfort had risen. She stroked her daughter's pale cheeks, wiped the tears from her own eyes, and whispered sadly:

"Poor child, you have to bear the whole burden! If poor papa was alive it would be different. Bring plenty of bread, Grete; the children are so hungry. Did Herr Wöss make a lot of fuss before he consented to give you the advance?"

"Don't ask, mamma! I'd rather not think about it at all; it's all so disgusting. . . . All right, I'll bring three loaves of bread in a minute."

The old gentleman had gone up to her, too.

"Grete," he said in a deep bass voice, "it won't last long; hard times always end some day. When the

Monarchy is restored, and the Emperor Otto has made his entry into Vienna surrounded by the Archdukes and Archduchesses, I shall go to the young Emperor and say to him: 'Your Majesty, there stands before you an old man, a former general, who fought and bled for his Emperor and Empire at Custozza and Königgrätz. . . .'"

"Capital, grandpapa; but that's still a long way off, and we may all of us have starved to death before we have the Monarchy back."

Old Herr Rumfort had only reached the rank of colonel on the active list, and had retired with the rank of major-general. He drew no pension at all, however, for he had many years before been obliged to mortgage it to his creditors until his death. He now went into the bedroom, which he shared with the boy, and, in anticipation of something unusual in the way of a supper, exchanged his tattered dressing-gown for a padded officer's overcoat of extreme antiquity. Frau Rumfort was attempting to light a fire in the kitchen grate with a few wood shavings that were left and a huge quantity of paper, in order to boil water for the sausages which Grete would bring home. The two children were left alone in the living-room.

Else, an excessively slender girl with a chronic cough and big, precocious eyes, nudged her younger brother.

"I say, Erich, I know why Grete didn't want to say whether her chief Herr Wöss was willing to give her the money. I'm sure he took liberties and wanted to kiss her. Do you know, there's a man like that at No. 54—I think he's a Slovak—who always looks out for me and gives me chocolate. The other day he folded up a ten thousand note * and shoved it down my neck, and said that if I'd be nice to him he'd give me another. I just gave him back the ten thousand and ran off. But I think now it was very silly of me! Next time I'll think twice about it, and then perhaps I'll be able to buy something nice for you and me. But you won't tell anybody, will you, Erich?"

Erich nodded.

"I won't say anything; but perhaps it'd be better if you told Grete first!"

"You silly boy! Of course, she wouldn't let me! Well, I'll think it over again! If the Slovak wasn't so horrid—if it was the Hofrat's son in our house, you know, the nice-looking young student, it'd be a different thing if it was him. But he doesn't look at me at all."

While a girl of thirteen was pursuing her still childish and yet subconsciously depraved train of thought, Grete was making her purchases. Five sausages, five kilos of potatoes, three loaves of bread,

* Actually only ten cents but with a greater purchasing power than in this country.

margarine, half a kilo of sugar, and then, as a special titbit, twenty decagrams of cheese; a few more trifles, and a hundred thousand crowns had gone. The girl, her cheeks flushed with enthusiasm, bought fuel at the coal cellar close by, to be delivered immediately, and then went to No. 56, the house with the many courtyards, to see the dressmaker, Frau Greifer, to whom she owed fifty thousand crowns for small jobs of all kinds.

Grete shuddered. Ugh! how revolting Herr Wöss, her employer, had been! Herr Wöss owned a so-called *Realitätengeschaft*,[1] and Grete was employed in his office as a shorthand typist on the starvation salary of six hundred thousand crowns a month. In return for this she had not only to work eight hours a day, but also put up with his amorous approaches. Herr Wöss had begun life as a market porter and had risen to wealth by devious ways, punctuated by several prosecutions. He wore earrings and was as thin as a lath; he had a drunkard's red nose in a pimply face, and a wide vulgar mouth full of gold-crowned teeth. He was always hanging about Grete as she worked, trying to touch her slim, pretty, girlish figure with his broad, flat, unwashed fingers, and only laughed in a cynical, sniggering manner when she pushed him away with her elbow.

[1] A business dealing in the jewelry, old furniture, etc., which the impoverished upper class were obliged to sell after the Revolution and the inflation of the currency.

That day Grete had had to go to him in his private room and ask him for the advance on her salary. On which he had pulled her on to his knee with a jerk, imprinted a kiss on her cheek, and declared that he would raise her salary and give her a million in advance, if she would be nice to him.

"Don't be silly, Fräulein Grete," he had said to her in his wheezy voice; "it doesn't matter whether I'm the first or someone else is, and if you'll be my little girl, you can wear velvet and silk, and all your troubles will be over."

More nauseated than angry, Grete freed herself and summoned up courage enough to say that she must leave her position at once if he would not give her the advance without such disgusting stipulations. On this she actually got the money. Wöss handed over the banknotes with a grin.

"You'll come to me all right in the end! Only then I shan't be the first, and you won't cost me nearly so much!"

Grete entered No. 56. She had to cross two courtyards before she came to courtyard No. 3, the long left-hand side of which was Frau Greifer's dressmaking establishment.

"If only papa were still alive!" Her mother's constantly repeated words went through her head like a refrain. Yes, if only papa were still alive, everything would be different. But papa had forsaken them, had deserted like a coward.

Eighteen months earlier Regierungsrat Rumfort had allowed himself to be voluntarily retired in exchange for a sum down. In accordance with the fashion of the day, he had taken his millions straight to a banker in the hope of doubling or trebling them on the Stock Exchange—of becoming a billionaire. For a few months everything had gone wonderfully, and they had lived on the fat of the land, until one day, after a minor slump on the Stock Exchange, Herr Rumfort had no money, no possessions, no post and no pension. In a fit of despair he put a bullet through his head.

Grete shuddered at the thought of it. That day had been the beginning of all their misery. Ornaments had had to be sold to pay the funeral expenses; she had to leave the Gymnasium and rapidly go through a course of training; then began the search for a job, until she found one with Herr Wöss. And now five persons lived on her wretched salary and the money received for the beautiful furniture, carpets, vases and knickknacks that had made the flat so cosy and pleasant.

But now, since autumn had set in, it had been impossible to keep going any longer. Hunger had begun to be a daily guest at their table. The future lay dark, threatening, ghost-like before Grete—breadwinner at seventeen, and the only member of the family with a head on her shoulders.

Chapter 5—Kind Frau Greifer

AS Grete entered the low, dark hall, out of which a door gave access to Frau Greifer's room, she met two young, smartly-dressed, heavily-rouged girls, who had just taken leave of the dressmaker. Frau Greifer was still calling after them that they must be in by ten o'clock; then she caught sight of Grete and admitted her. The room opening out of the passage was just what a suburban tailor's workshop might be imagined to be. It contained a large rough-planed table, two sewing-machines, a rickety lay figure, patterns and fashion papers on the table and on a stand.

Frau Greifer was a woman of about forty, whose short, thick body almost overflowed her flowered dressing-gown. Her fat rosy face seemed to be built in four stories: her low forehead formed the top floor, then came the part from forehead to mouth, containing a tiny nose like a cork, then the round chin, and the loose flesh of her double chin was the ground floor. Her short fleshy fingers were covered

with rings; her gray eyes, set deep in rolls of fat, flickered keenly and restlessly hither and thither. At the first glance Frau Greifer might have been taken for one of the stout, good-natured, motherly persons in whom Vienna abounds; but a closer inspection dispelled this impression, and the atmosphere which surrounded her globular figure became one of sordidness, full of suggestions of a shady past.

In the house with the three courtyards, and in the neighborhood generally, there was a great deal of vague gossip about Frau Greifer: stories were told of nocturnal orgies at which the fun was fast and furious; but no one knew anything definite. Nor was it possible to find out anything, for the porter and his wife—the chroniclers of all that happens in the houses of Vienna—gave no information. Whether, as was alleged, they received considerable sums in return for their discretion it was impossible to prove.

In any case, the position of the house must have been very convenient to Frau Greifer. It was the only dwelling-house in the third courtyard. Opposite to it was an electrical workshop, which shut at five in the afternoon. Moreover, the last of the six rooms the house contained led into a little shop, which in the daytime was occupied by a scantily visited servants' registry office. That the proprietress of the registry office in question, a little humpbacked

woman, was Frau Greifer's niece, was a further circumstance highly convenient to that lady. The shop had no entrance in the Melchiorgasse, but led into a narrow blind alley running out of the Melchiorgasse, and opposite to it was a high blank wall. The position, therefore, was that the dressmaker's extensive dwelling could be entered both from courtyard No. 3 of 56 Melchiorgasse, and from the little shop in the side alley.

Frau Greifer greeted Grete Rumfort with the greatest geniality.

"Good gracious, Fräulein von Rumfort, fancy seeing you again after all this time!"

She added, examining the girl with the critical penetrating glance of an expert:

"How pretty you've grown, Fräulein—a regular beauty! Such a delicate little face and a figure like a princess! And such pretty feet! Men must go silly when they walk behind you in the street. There's nothing so lovely as you in the Melchiorgasse nowadays. I'd like to make you a nice winter coat and skirt—mayn't I?"

Grete refused, blushing.

"I can't afford it, Frau Greifer. I've only come to repay you the fifty thousand crowns I've owed you since last spring, when you made our mourning for us."

"But, Fräulein Grete, I've never troubled you for

it, have I? We won't talk about a few miserable crowns. And as for not being able to afford it, you can pay me when you like. A lady with your looks needn't worry about money. You simply can't go about in those old things any longer."

Grete nodded sadly.

"You're quite right, Frau Greifer, but it isn't possible; I have to keep my mother, my grandfather, and my brother and sister on the starvation pay I get. I don't know, as it is, how we are going to manage in future."

An infinite weariness and weakness suddenly overcame Grete. She began to weep bitterly, and, between her sobs, confided to the dressmaker all her anxieties and torments.

Frau Greifer was all sympathy—sincere sympathy indeed. She caressed the girl's slim, delicate hands and implored her in tones of maternal tenderness:

"Don't cry, Fräulein, don't spoil your dear little blue eyes! A pretty girl like you only needs not to be silly, then she'll draw the first prize all right. And now I'll call Henriette and tell her to bring the patterns and take your measurements, and you needn't worry about the money."

Grete dried her eyes. The longing for a new dress which overcame her was so violent that it swept away all scruples. She was filled with new courage for her struggle with life, and there echoed

in her ears, as though borne from afar, the words "don't be silly"—those luring, seductive words which men and women whispered to her every day.

The real manageress of the dressmaking establishment, Fräulein Henriette, who was also one of the occupants of the house, entered the room, tall stately and buxom. She looked the fair, pretty, slender girl up and down with a half-ironical, half-admiring glance, and then said with decision:

"I have dark-green velours with light-gray trimming, which will suit you better than anything. But you cannot possibly wear that hat with it. I'll find you one that matches it."

Frau Greifer nodded eagerly.

"And gray silk stockings and buckskin gloves, and you'll look like a princess, Fräulein! Heavens! what shoes you've got on! Just look at them, Henriette! To think that a pretty young lady like you should go about in such things! Look here, Fräulein von Rumfort, you go straight over to Wisloschill at No. 54 and tell him to make you one or two pairs of nice fashionable shoes, and put them down to my account!"

Grete came to her senses, and her scruples were reawakened.

"Good heavens! Frau Greifer, I shall never be able to pay you! What are you thinking of? And I haven't an idea what all that will cost!"

"Nonsense, don't worry about that! Only don't be silly, and I'll get my bill paid all right some day, and you'll be able to order as many dresses as you like, Fräulein Grete. Just listen: I've a customer, a lady, who has a dress made here pretty well every month. She never asks the price, and the most expensive things are too cheap for her. And yesterday the Herr Direktor, whose friend she is, gave her a real beaver fur that cost a hundred millions. And do you know what that girl was only two years ago? A little starving wretch, a lamplighter's daughter! She was errand girl to a modiste at Lerchenfeld. It was through the modiste I got to know her, and now she never goes anywhere except in a car. She always says, 'Frau Greifer,' she says, 'I owe all my good luck to you alone. God will reward you for it!' "

Grete had listened attentively, and she shivered inwardly. But she offered no further resistance, and let Fräulein Henriette take her measurements. She saw herself in the green velours coat and skirt, felt herself leaning comfortably back in her own motorcar, and the words "don't be silly, don't be silly," echoed a thousand times in her ears.

Grete hurried home to the flat with burning cheeks, handed over her purchases to her mother—who lamented because she had stayed out so long—and told her hastily that she still had a trifling

errand and would be back in a minute. Then she went to the cobbler Wisloschill, who had his shop and living-room on the ground floor of the tenement house No. 54.

It was perfectly true, she could no longer wear these patched, resoled, worn-out, old-fashioned shoes, which let in water everywhere. Especially if she got the dark-green velours coat and skirt with the gray trimming, and the silk stockings. She would look like a princess! Yes, Frau Greifer had said so, and she knew what she was talking about. What would it all cost? A million, or even two, or three? But she would not think about that now; she would be a lady at last, like those whom she passed at lunch-time in the Graben, when hurrying home to her dinner of vegetables. And was she not a thousand times prettier than those ladies in their furs and silks? Was there a single one of them to compare with her for youth and beauty?

No! no! no! She would be silly no longer; she would have her share of life; she would no longer see her mother worrying herself to death, her brother and sister crying of hunger and getting hardly even a scrap of dry bread!

But what should she do? Sell herself she would not, at any price. To a fellow as revolting as Wöss, perhaps! B-r-r-r! But did it follow that all rich men were disgusting? Surely some of them were young,

clever, slim, cultured and well-dressed; and if one of these should fall in love with her, of course he would marry her. And why not, for that matter? After all, she was young and pretty, she came of a good, indeed an aristocratic family, and had gone through five classes at the Gymnasium. She was poor, miserably poor—but could she help that? The handsome, rich man with the motor-car would love and treasure her all the more for that. He would be the first, the man for whom she had saved herself, for whose sake she had repressed her girlish longings, had gone hungry and cold. Yes, that was how it would turn out! Only—she mustn't be silly, she mustn't be silly!

Chapter 6—What the Apprentice Saw

THERE was some excitement at No. 54, which Grete now entered. A thin, care-worn woman was standing in the doorway weeping bitterly, and other women trying to calm her, while a slightly intoxicated man kept on shouting in a thick voice:

"Don't you worry yourself about it, Frau Huber; in Siberia the women cry if their husbands don't knock them about because then they think they don't love them any more."

Grete was curious, and asked what had happened.

"Her husband has hit her in the face and made it bleed, the dirty beast!"

"They're a rough, brutal lot, all of them," an older woman assured them. "Oh, yes; when my old man found anything not just as he liked it, he laid into me right away!"

A pretty young woman, who looked quite smart in her fur jacket, shook her head.

"Now I see what a good husband I've got! We've been married five years now, and I've never had an

unkind word from him. He works like a horse all day so that I can have everything I want; he'd like to rig me out in velvet and silk from head to foot. Since our child was born his only thought has been to get a bigger flat, so that we can get out of this place and keep a servant."

"Yes, Frau Pollak, you're well off," said the woman who had been struck, and who by now had dried her tears, "because you've a Jew for a husband. You're really to be envied!"

"Yes, indeed," the old woman echoed her; "it's quite true! People can say what they like about the Jews, but they're good husbands and never beat their wives."

"They're very generous," a pretty young girl with penciling under her eyes assured them. "My friend, the one I've got now, is a Jew, and I'm going to Gerngross with him to-morrow, because he wants to buy me a new dress. He hasn't got much himself, but what he has he shares with me."

"You're shameless wenches, the whole lot of you," the slightly intoxicated man shouted, "if you can have anything to do with those filthy Jews! They ought to have their necks wrung, those swindling Jews, who take the money out of our pockets and dishonor our wives and daughters besides!"

As the discussion now became extremely violent, Grete thought it best to go to the cobbler Wisloschill

and order two pairs of shoes, to be charged to Frau Greifer's account.

In the Czech cobbler's shop, which was his kitchen and living-room as well, there was also some excitement, but for quite different reasons.

The apprentice, a bright, cheery lad, had just returned to Vienna after a month's absence. He had fallen ill with catarrh of the lungs and had gone to his parents in the country to complete his recovery. He had left Vienna the morning after the discovery of the murder at No. 55, so that he had heard nothing of the crime till now, after his return. And now he gave some information which greatly excited Wisloschill and his wife.

When Grete entered and gave her order, the cobbler called his apprentice.

"Franz, the Fräulein is educated; she's been to schools where they learn Latin; tell us again just what you know."

Franz, feeling himself an important person, gave a detailed account of his observations.

About seven on the evening of the crime he had to fetch a pair of boots from an engineer who lived on the first floor of No. 55, because a burst seam in the upper leather had to be stitched at once. A tall man had entered the house behind him, whose smart, dark-gray overcoat with a gray fur collar had attracted the boy's notice. Franz, who

had himself reached the first floor, saw the man open Frau Merkel's door on the mezzanine.

Franz had had to wait a few minutes at the engineer's flat, and was actually on the stairs leading from the first floor to the mezzanine, when a thickly-veiled lady enveloped in a fur coat ran up with feverish haste from the ground floor and stopped outside Frau Merkel's door. Feeling curious, the apprentice stopped, too, and noticed that the well-dressed lady rang twice in succession; the door was opened at once, and she slipped in as though anxious not to be seen.

Franz knew for what purpose Frau Merkel rented a room and presumably had his own precocious ideas about the visit of the lady and gentleman. The repairs were finished about nine, and the apprentice took the boots back again. Just as he was leaving No. 54 he saw the man in the overcoat coming hurriedly out of No. 55, exactly opposite. The man looked round him in every direction and started off down the street, but after a few steps he stopped, in apparent indecision, and disappeared into the doorway of the next house but one, No. 51.

Perplexed—the cobbler's boy also stopped. Why had the man gone from one house to the other? There were no flats at No. 51, a one-floor building where furniture was stored. What could the man

want in a house which was inhabited only by a porter in the courtyard at the back?

But now the man was in the street again, and hurrying towards the center of the town. He stopped only once more before he disappeared into the darkness, and that was under a gas lamp, which revealed him clearly. And now the lad, with his good eyesight, saw that the smartly-dressed gentleman who earlier, at seven o'clock, had beyond doubt possessed a black pointed beard and worn pince-nez, had them no longer. He was now clean-shaven!

Franz, whose imagination had been richly nourished by the film dramas and penny dreadfuls, immediately thought that some mysterious crime must have been committed, but had no opportunity of imparting his observation to the cobbler or his wife, as both had already gone to bed. Next morning he had to get up early to catch his train to Aspang, and the whole incident would have vanished from his memory if he had not now, after his return, heard of the terrible murder of the beautiful and rich Frau Leid, the perpetrator of which was still undiscovered.

Grete was interested. She waited till the lad had finished his story, and then advised the cobbler to go to the police-station with Franz next day.

Frau Wisloschill, a refined woman, who had been

a housemaid in well-to-do homes and had there acquired good manners and some culture, indulged in a few philosophic speculations while her husband took the pretty girl's measure.

"What a shame that a woman like that, whose husband made her life an earthly paradise, should go to a low-down hole with a fellow whom perhaps, she hardly knew! It served her right; that's what ought to happen to all women who play their husbands false!"

"Perhaps she was very much in love with him," said Grete reflectively.

"In love! When a woman has a good husband, who really cares for her, she's got no business to fall in love with anyone else; but I know all these rich women have lovers; it's the fashionable thing to have one; and if a woman is decent the others laugh at her. I've been a servant in the best families for twenty years, so I know exactly what goes on there. I once heard with my own ears my mistress say to a young married lady, 'You're nervy because you haven't a lover! Get one as quickly as you can, then you'll soon find life much more amusing!' People abuse a poor girl if she sells herself because she's poor and wants to get something out of life, and rich women chuck themselves at the head of the first man they meet who can dance, just to pass the time!"

Herr Wisloschill had finished, and Grete said, slightly embarrassed, that the bill was to be sent to Frau Greifer. A smile played over the cobbler's face, while Frau Wisloschill looked up in surprise.

"Have you known Frau Greifer long, Fräulein?" she asked.

"I don't know her at all," Grete replied, flushing; "she made our mourning when father died, that's all."

Frau Wisloschill exchanged glances with her husband and then said hesitatingly:

"I don't want to say anything against Frau Greifer, she's our best customer—she's always sending ladies here—but I think a nice girl like you, of good family—well, if I were in your place I wouldn't have anything to do with Frau Greifer. People say all kinds of things—and a pretty girl like you gets into trouble twice as easily as another."

Wisloschill interrupted her roughly.

"Talking nonsense as usual, old woman! Fräulein wants shoes, can't you see? Do you want her to work herself to death and get consumption from bad food? If Fräulein Rumfort's got sense, she'll know what to do. Don't you be silly, Fräulein, and you'll have all the men on the string!"

Frau Wisloschill said no more, and Grete went home, where she had long been eagerly awaited, in a state of mental confusion and stupefaction. That

night she dreamed that she was sitting, with a beautiful fur coat on, beside a tall, handsome man with pleasant, friendly eyes. The man tried to draw her to him and kiss her, and she was resisting gently when the chauffeur, whose features were those of Frau Greifer, turned round and called to her, in contemptuous tones, "Don't be silly, don't be silly!"

She was awakened at seven by the clang of her alarm clock, dressed shivering in the unheated room, drank sip by sip a cup of nasty malt coffee, and hurried off on foot in her thin, shabby old dress and her torn, down-at-heel shoes to her office in the Hoher Markt, to work for Herr Wöss.

The typewriter clicked rapidly, and to Grete it seemed to be beating time to the words "Don't be silly, don't be silly!"

Chapter 7—The Table Telephone

OTTO DEMEL of the *Vienna Herald* was walking up and down in the office of the solicitor, Dr. Leid, who sat at his writing-table and stared gloomily in front of him. The extensive offices were in a building at the corner of the Goldschmiedgasse and the Stephansplatz, and when Demel stopped by the window he saw before him the majestic Cathedral, and at his feet the Graben with its crowds of people and press of traffic.

Demel was more than ten years younger than Leid; nevertheless the two men were united by a close friendship, dating from the first year of the war, when Leid was a captain in the Landsturm and Demel a young lieutenant of the reserve.

Leid had aged by years since his wife's terrible death. He jumped up and wrung his hands.

"I shall never have a minute's peace till the brute who murdered Lia is under lock and key!" he cried. "I know there isn't a man who wouldn't laugh at me, but so it is: I still love Lia in death, I bear her

no malice, and if she were alive again I could not utter a word of reproach to her. She was so young and beautiful, and I old and tired! Had I any right to her loyalty? Ought I not to have been happy just to live in the same house with her, to rejoice in her youth and beauty, to caress her cool white hand, to feel her breath near me at night? And to think that the man lives who could take her, without thinking of her beauty, not wanting her kisses, but only the wretched pearls and stones and the few miserable banknotes she had with her! To think that the brute is somewhere among us, that perhaps I take off my hat to him, speak to him, shake hands with him—the thought drives me mad!"

The journalist was profoundly distressed at his friend's outburst of grief.

"I'm afraid there's not much prospect of the fellow being caught," he said. "I was talking about it to Schmitz only yesterday. Horak is working day and night on the case, but he hasn't discovered anything of importance yet. Certainly they have just got evidence from an apprentice, who saw the man with the pointed beard arrive and leave. He says that the man went into a doorway with a beard and came out again a moment later without it. So it's certain that the murderer's pointed beard was false. Also, that he wore a dark-gray overcoat with

a gray fur collar. But coats of that kind are very fashionable nowadays; I've got one, I believe you have, too, and so have, probably, a few dozen more of our acquaintances."

The servant brought in a visiting-card. The solicitor lifted his eyebrows, looked at his friend and whispered:

"Josef Horak! The detective you were talking about just now."

He added, to the servant:

"Show him in, and see that we are not disturbed."

The young detective with the mobile intelligent features greeted Dr. Leid and also the journalist—for whom he had a great respect—and sat down. He was immediately asked what news he brought

"No great news, only ideas and possibilities. In the first place, the landlady, Frau Merkel, and the apprentice to the cobbler, Wisloschill, both say that the man with the false pointed beard had on patent-leather shoes. Frau Merkel simply says patent-leather shoes; the apprentice, who has trained eyes for such things, says patent-leather pumps. Undoubtedly he had on a dresscoat or a dinner-jacket. It may be presumed that he knew your wife socially. Having committed the crime, he went away at nine o'clock. Does that not suggest that he, too, had been invited to Generaldirektor Rosenow's, and

went straight from the Melchiorgasse to Pötzleinsdorf?"

The two other men were struck dumb with surprise. This was a possibility of which they had never thought. The murderer among them after the crime —a witness of the husband's torturing uneasiness as he waited for his wife, of his collapse when the awful news came!—a more devilish game the wildest imagination could not conceive!

"I have got a list," Horak continued, "of all the gentlemen who were Herr Kommerzialrat Rosenow's guests that evening. At present I cannot find one who could in the remotest degree be suspected of the murder. At least twenty of the guests knew you, Herr Doktor, and, therefore, your late wife as well. It happens that of these men nine are tall and slight—all of them in a position which should put them above suspicion. You yourself, Herr Demel, if I may say so, are tall and slight, have a Raglan overcoat with a fur collar, are among those who know Dr. Leid well, arrived at the Rosenow's after nine; and are, moreover, a bachelor who is said to be far from ill-disposed towards pretty women."

Demel laughed, though with a not quite agreeable sensation, while Leid twisted his face in a tortured smile.

"But now, Herr Doktor, I must ask a favor of you. While we have searched the room in Frau

Merkel's flat ten times from top to bottom without finding the slightest clew, it has so far not occurred to Hofrat Schmitz to search your flat, which has been shut up since the crime. But I consider that very important. It is quite possible that we may find among your late wife's papers some visiting-cards, notes, letters or something of the kind, showing with whom the lady was on intimate terms towards the end of her life. May I ask you, therefore, to come with me to the Arenbergring now, so that I may have a look round?"

The solicitor exchanged glances with Demel. The latter nodded eagerly, on which Leid rose and said running his hand nervously over his forehead:

"You are quite right; it will have to be done. I have not been into the flat since her death and, in any case, I shall have the furniture stored and hand the flat over to the Housing Office. We had better go at once."

"May I come, too?" Demel asked.

"Certainly, if Dr. Leid has no objection. You newspaper men are admitted everywhere."

The solicitor's motor-car was in readiness below, and the three men drove to the Arenbergring in silence. The large flat, bay-windowed and balconied, was on the second floor of a palatial modern building. No one had entered it for weeks. The servants had been dismissed immediately after the murder;

the blinds and curtains were drawn; the beautiful rooms, furnished with exquisite taste, on whose walls hung valuable pictures and rare engravings and water-colors, lay cold, dark and gloomy.

Dr. Leid, trembling all over his body, and deathly pale, opened the door of one of the rooms and whispered in a strange voice, as though endeavoring to suppress a sob:

"This is my wife's room. She used to keep her letters in this writing-table."

It was a charming, coquettish rococo boudoir. Every piece of furniture dated from the period. On the walls, which were covered with silk tapestry, were a genuine Watteau and a Fragonard. In the raised bay-window was a broad, low divan covered with an exquisite piece of old silk. Close by, the table telephone stood on a small, quite low ebony table.

"Lia had been sleeping here for some little time," Leid said. He added in a low voice which only his friend could hear, and with a bitter smile: "She said that sleeping in the same room with me got on her nerves. And she had the telephone here close beside her; the other is in the library."

Horak began deliberately to examine the contents of the writing-table. In every drawer were heaps of letters, photographs, visiting-cards, receipted bills, and picture postcards from all the

countries in the world. Leid and Demel left the detective to do his work alone, and sat in silence opposite one another in the smoking-room, the walls of which were lined with book-cases.

The young police official went through all the papers with care. Here were dried up, withered roses, there a little silk handkerchief exhaling a strong scent, while hundreds of visiting-cards were scattered among the letters and bills.

The detective, who, young as he was, had acquired a fair share of cynicism in the exercise of his profession, smiled contemptuously. Side by side lay two bundles of letters tied up with ribbon—the solicitor's passionate outpourings to his young *fiancée* and her cooler, but yet tender, replies. The detective read through only one of them; it ended with the words:

"I shall cling to you, faithful and constant, as the ivy twines about a stout tree. I shall always love you, and I cannot imagine that another man could ever exist for me."

The detective noted several names on a pad and put the visiting-cards in his pocket; and then, after a good hour, the examination of the writing-table was concluded. It had yielded no result of importance. Horak stood wrapt in thought and looked round the room once more. On that sofa, in the daytime, the beautiful woman had spent hours of idle-

ness; and, if the cushions could speak, they could tell of all manner of sinful thoughts. And that little telephone, the medium of who knew how many confidential talks!

Acting on a sudden inspiration, Horak strode to the instrument, bent over it, and examined long and thoroughly the white tablet on which, as usual, telephone numbers and addresses were scribbled. The figures were scrawled confusedly all over the tablet; some were rubbed out, others crossed out, and some occurred more than once.

Whistling to himself, Horak took a magnifying glass from his pocket and examined the numbers. Here was one which seemed to have been written more recently than the others; it occurred ten times or more, thoughtlessly scribbled on the tablet to while away the time of waiting. The detective noted this number and all the others which he could make out.

Chapter 8—Modern Girls

REGINA ROSENOW, the only child of the Central European Bank's billionaire managing director, was surrounded by her guests. It was her "day," Not, however, in the parental palace in the Pötzleinsdorfer Allee, but at Hopfner's in the Kärntnerstrasse. She had taken a room there every Wednesday from five o'clock onwards, which, with the *chambres séparées* adjoining it, was at the disposal of herself and her guests. Some of the men she knew had not time to come to the remote Pötzleinsdorfer Allee; moreover, at Hopfner's she had a greater sense of freedom—she need not play hostess, but could leave it to the waiters to see to everything. Besides, towards the close of the entertainment, she and her friends could let themselves go in a way that was hardly possible at home.

The *chambres séparées,* those pretty little rooms into which the guests could disappear in couples, were an especially piquant feature of Regina Rosenow's "days."

Apart from all these external advantages, at Hopfner's, Regina was safe from her worthy mamma. Not that Frau Rosenow would have placed any obstacles in her daughter's way; the good woman stood far too much in awe of Regina for that. But despite the vehement reproaches she received from her daughter afterwards, she could never refrain from coming into the room, begging the young ladies and gentlemen present to eat plenty, and saying as she left, "Be good children!"

These grandmotherly outpourings caused a general lowering of the atmosphere, and if little Baroness Mädi Sekkingen and Count Ugo Waldeck exchanged ironical glances, Regina was out of spirits for the whole evening.

On this occasion, the "day" of the pretty billionaire's daughter, whose reddish-gold shingled hair contrasted strikingly with her opalescent green eyes, was particularly lively. It was the first tea of the season—the first, moreover, since the unlucky supper-party at the Rosenows' which had ended so abruptly; the elections were over, so that there was plenty of material for conversation, and all Regina's more or less intimate friends were there. Most of the guests were girls under twenty and men under thirty; Otto Demel, who was thirty-two, was the oldest man in the room. With him was a young man with a mobile, clean-shaven, humorous face, whom

he introduced as Josef Hort, a landowner's son from Upper Austria.

The murder of beautiful Frau Lia Leid was once more the subject of the conversation. Rudi Poper, a successful racing motorist, and in his spare time his father's junior partner, was waxing indignant.

"A scandalous business!" he exclaimed. "If a woman has a lover she ought at least to know who he is. But this Frau Leid seems to have picked up the first fellow she met in the street."

"Perhaps he was a very good-looking man, and she couldn't resist him," said Hilde Spitzer, a girl of Jewish family, but a strict Catholic. She was lean, pale and freckled, but her nostrils quivered and her lips were full and moist.

"If she was keen on good-looking men she could have bought herself a smart young Tyrolese climber in the summer," drawled Baron Eichhorn, who, now as plain Eichhorn, represented a shady bank on the Stock Exchange. "That's what American women like doing. Over in the States they're proper and prudish, preach water and morality; but when they're in Europe they swill whiskey and bribe attractive guides and elevator-boys to be their lovers."

Regina Rosenow was half-lying in her armchair, so that her slim legs were uncovered high above the knee. The concentrated gaze of the young men caused her not the slightest embarrassment. She blew

out the smoke of her cigarette in rings, and said thoughtfully:

"Of course, poor Lia had a right to have any lover she liked. It doesn't matter whether he was a guide or a count, so long as he satisfied her as a lover. What really matters is that a woman shall be able to tell one kind of man from another. An instinct for men, that's all she needs. And that's what Lia Leid doesn't seem to have had, or she wouldn't have got mixed up with a fellow who took her off to a room just to rob her."

The hired pianist began to play a tango *milonga,* and the dancers took the floor, pressed tightly to one another. Otto Demel, who was an excellent dancer, glided off with Regina Rosenow.

"Herr Egon Stirner is annoyed. I got on before him. But he's a good-looking fellow. I think he's going to start a flirtation with you. Do you like him?"

"Like? I don't think that's the right word. He interests me. He is intelligent, self-controlled, full of suppressed energy, and at the same time he makes the impression of a wild beast. He has the eyes of a beast of prey; when he looks at one hard they glow like a wildcat's."

Demel gave a short laugh.

"In a word," he said, "your virtue is in danger?"

He took Regina back to her chair.

"Virtue? What's that? Do you mean the 'I'd like to, but I daren't' of our mothers' days? No; I'm in no danger, because I know exactly what I want."

Count Ugo Waldeck, surrounded by young ladies, was telling a funny story, the significance of which was entirely obvious. The girls giggled, cried "shame," and, pretending to be shocked, turned their unclothed backs on the ex-Count, while Hilde Spitzer laughed nervously. Her full, scarlet lips were covered with moisture, her nostrils quivered, and she whispered hoarsely to Waldeck, a man who could have been recognized as an aristocrat at a hundred yards:

"Tell us another!"

Ugo Waldeck ran his cold gray eyes over the girl's figure, and caressed her bare arm with his long, bony fingers.

"With pleasure, but not here, with all these geese listening. Come into one of the *particuliers;* we'll have a bottle of champagne there."

The girl followed him as though hypnotized. She had left the Sacré Cœur only a year before. . . .

Egon Stirner pushed his chair close to Regina Rosenow's. He spoke of the loneliness of his existence. He had lost his parents while he was on the Italian front. After the Revolution his sister had died of influenza. He had kept himself for weeks by selling newspapers in the streets. He had

hawked papers by day and studied banking and the law of exchange by night, till at last he had found a post in the Central European Bank.

"Papa told me yesterday that he had made you his own personal secretary," Regina said. "That makes your career safe."

"Yes, your father likes me well enough; I'm his right-hand man already. On the whole, I've nothing to complain of. My speculations have always been lucky—but I'm lonely, terribly lonely! I've got what people call popularity with women—but what kind of women are they? Look at all these women and girls of our set. They were meant to be good wives and mothers, and they want to be worldly and disreputable at all costs. They know nothing, they've no wills of their own, they're artificial creatures, of whom one is tired when one has been with them three times. They give a man everything they've got in them in the first hour of a *tête-à tête;* the second time they open the conversation by asking what news there is; and the third time the intervals between your tender embraces are as dull as Frau von Pollak's 'day.' But where is the woman, the real woman, dynamic, intellectual, capricious, and yet capable of sacrifice, who can make every meeting a banquet, every embrace a vivid experience? I seek and seek, I go from woman to woman—but I have not found her yet."

Regina drew a long breath and then asked hesitatingly:

"They say you were a friend of Lia Leid's. Wasn't she the woman you are looking for?"

"A charming, pretty woman—nothing more. And, for that matter, I was not at all intimate with her; it was a little flirtation that had only just begun—nothing more. No; even Lia Leid was not the woman who could have held me for good and all. She must be a remarkable personality, like, say——"

Stirner did not finish his sentence, but fixed his eyes on the girl's. Regina jumped up with a mocking laugh.

"One with heaps and heaps of money—that's the most important thing, isn't it?"

Egon Stirner did not appear either angry or hurt. He stepped so close to Regina that she could feel his breath upon her face, put his arm about her for the "Java," which had just begun, and said quietly:

"Yes; she must have money, too, lots of money. For money and civilization and luxury are inseparable, and I need all I can get of these things."

Otto Demel and the friend he had brought, Herr Josef Hort, had been standing behind the two, apparently absorbed in their own conversation, and had heard every word. When the dance was over, the journalist, accompanied by Hort, went up to Stirner.

"Do you know," he said, "that the whole Stock Exchange is talking about you? I have been told that you have been buying Krieglach timber shares very heavily. The whole boom in timber is said to be due to it. People admire your daring, whatever else they may think. Kleiner of the Discounters Union Bank said to me to-day, 'Egon Stirner is the coming man, assuming that he doesn't break his neck before he gets there.' So, as I like having billionaires for my friends, I hope you won't break your own neck, but a dozen bears' necks instead."

Stirner smiled urbanely.

"People exaggerate, of course. I have certainly made a few speculations, but nothing more. They haven't brought me in a Graf and Stift car yet, a thing I'm desperately keen on having."

Not a word had escaped Regina Rosenow. She determined to speak to papa next morning about Egon Stirner. He made a strong appeal to her. Of course she could make a better match; a German ex-prince and an English lord were anxious to marry her; but Stirner—he was a man, a real man.

It was eleven o'clock, and the fun had become fast and furious. If a stranger had entered the room and seen all those girls, with heated faces and disordered clothes and hair, lying in the young men's arms and ecstatically abandoning themselves to the passionate rhythm of the dance; if he had overheard

the talk, and seen the couples gliding out of the darkened *chambres séparées* to make room for other waiting couples, he would never have guessed that those present were without exception girls belonging to rich families and young men whose daily task was the reconstruction of the State.

There were only four sober people in the room—Demel, his companion Hort, the bank employee Stirner and Regina Rosenow. Regina was too afraid of herself to dare to drink much. She knew her own weakness, and that she must be on her guard.

About twelve o'clock the motor-cars began to drive up to take the girls home. The cool night air quickly brought them to their senses. The hands which had caressed and been caressed now lay cool and unresponsive in those which pressed them; lips sought for farewell kisses remained tightly closed; appointments were refused or postponed, or fixed for some other place than the bachelor flat at first designated; promises were taken back with a shrug of the shoulders.

The next day was settlement day on the Stock Exchange, and one which might be stormy. Most of the men, therefore, decided to look in at a *café* for a short time and then go to bed; they must keep their heads clear. Some went off to visit their mistresses, and a party, including Count Waldeck, drove to No. 56 Melchiorgasse. Sigi Moskowitz de-

clared that there were always pretty girls to be found there.

"The Greifer woman was babbling to me the other day," he said, "about a girl she was going to get hold of, quite new to the business and perfectly respectable."

Otto Demel walked slowly and contemplatively along the Kärntnerstrasse with the man he had taken to the party. Suddenly he burst out:

"The devil! And people dare to despise and persecute poor girls who sell themselves because they need the money which this gang gets out of them in one way or another! But why be angry? These girls and boys are only the products of their age, after all, and so not responsible for themselves and the way they behave. And now, Horak, tell me why you got me to take you to this party under a false name, and what you have against Egon Stirner."

The detective Horak—for the young squire Hort was none other than he—did not reply till a whole minute had passed.

"What have I against Egon Stirner? Only too much—and so have you for that matter! A suspicion. I suspect him of having murdered Frau Lia Leid!"

Demel stopped and answered excitedly:

"Yes; I suspect him, too. I don't know when and

how I began to suspect him. But it was only a few days ago, when someone told me that he had suddenly become one of the most daring speculators, that a terrible suspicion took shape in my mind. I saw his wild beast's eyes before me, cold and yet always changing color; and I felt that of all the people who had hovered round Lia he was the only one whom I could believe guilty of murder. And I was not in the least surprised when you asked me to introduce you into his circle under false colors. But I do ask you now to tell me everything you know."

"Certainly, I will; and not only because I know you are a man whom I can trust and am sure you will not say a word to a soul, but for egotistical reasons, too—I need you! But I'd rather not talk here in the street. One can easily talk too loud when one is walking, and somebody might play the eavesdropper without our knowing it. The Café Habsburg is open till three this morning; let us look for a corner there."

The Café Habsburg, in which, after a long search, the journalist and the detective found a table by a window, was crowded with people of every class and race. Third-rate courtesans, solid housewives with their husbands, pallid youths in couples with curled hair and loud ties, clerks in search of a cheap adventure, worn-out old men feasting their eyes on the scene, Balkan travelers passing through Vienna, buxom women who had sold themselves for many

years and were now about to sell others instead, noisy music, suspicious waiters, flower-girls and match-sellers with obscene pictures and pornographic books in their pockets.

Horak began his story.

"I did not know Herr Stirner," he said; "and had not the slightest reason for suspecting him in particular. It was not till I searched Frau Lia Leid's room that I began to pay any attention to him. I found no clues whatever in the drawers of the writing-table; but I did find important clues on the tablet belonging to the telephone by Frau Leid's sofa. Figures were scribbled all over it; you know yourself how one automatically scribbles down the number one wants while waiting with the receiver in one's hand. It struck me that the number 98972 had been written down more frequently than any other number, and seemed recent and clear, much more so than the others. I made a note of all the numbers I could make out and checked them afterwards. None but 98972 was at all suspicious; they were dressmakers, modistes, furriers, the Rosenows' villa, Dr. Leid's office. But the number 98972, which occurred so often, was the Central European Bank—to be precise, the secretaries' office at the Bank.

"The next thing I did was to take the list of people who had been at the Rosenows' on the evening of the crime. Among them were four men connected with the Bank—Vice-President Nagelstock,

an old man of sixty; Dr. Pramer, one of the Board, a little hunchback; the head clerk, Ludwig Winterfeld, a fat man with an enormous stomach and six children; and Herr Egon Stirner. Stirner was the only one who could possibly be a pretty woman's lover, and my observations were now concentrated on him.

"I will tell you all that I have found out. Egon Stirner is thirty-three; his father was a clerk in the Post Office, and is dead. His mother is dead, too. He was a good-for-nothing boy, and emigrated to America before he had got through the Gymnasium. Then he lived for a few years here, there and everywhere—in the United States, Africa and Australia. He came to Vienna just before the war broke out, and joined up as a private, but was soon transferred to the espionage service on account of his knowledge of languages. He spent the last two years of the war in Switzerland; but he seems to have done more espionage there for France than for his own country. They say that when he was at Geneva his game was to entice Germans over the frontier and get them caught by the French.

"When the war was over he came back to Vienna and joined the Communists; but he soon left them and got mixed up in all sorts of transactions with profiteers and speculators."

"In short, a really nice fellow," Demel broke in.

"Quite so; a gentleman from top to toe! In 1920

he entered the newly-founded Central European Bank and is still there. He got on well, thanks to his good manners, knowledge of languages and hard work. He has been in the secretaries' office for three months, and so he got to know General-direktor Rosenow personally and was asked to his house. And through Rosenow he got to know Lia Leid and her husband."

"But still there's nothing in all that which can justify our suspecting him of the murder."

"Just listen. Stirner had been speculating all these years with little luck and no cover. At last he became indebted to his own bank for a considerable sum, and was sharply rapped over the knuckles by the head clerk.

"Two days after Frau Leid was murdered Stirner took a week's holiday which was due to him and went off to Italy. He said he was going to Venice, but that can't have been true. When he came back he paid his debt to his bank, deposited fairly large sums in other banks, and began to speculate on the Stock Exchange on a large scale. The boom in timber is due to his purchases, and if he sold out he would gain a colossal sum. But, according to my information, he has not done this, but has gone on speculating."

"And what do you mean to do now?" Demel asked.

"I can't say at the moment. There are no definite

grounds for suspecting Stirner, nothing that would justify any step being taken against him. I am convinced that Stirner went to Italy with the stolen pearls and stones in order to sell them there. But how am I to prove it? How could I trace him in Italy? It would be easier to find a needle in a bundle of hay. As soon as a man has crossed the Italian frontier he can put up at a hotel under any name he likes to take, without anyone interfering with him. Stirner speaks Italian perfectly, so that no one there would suspect that he was a Viennese. There are dozens of dealers in Venice, Milan and Genoa, who buy up stolen pearls and stones and dispose of them abroad. For all we know, the splendid pearls may be in London or New York already. If things happened in real life as they do in popular crime stories, I should pick up a clew in a white-bearded receiver's shop in some dark alley in Venice. But we are not in a novel, as it happens, but in real life; and receivers don't keep shops in dark alleys, nor have they white beards; on the contrary, they are gentlemen of fashion, perfectly brushed and oiled. No, I shall not leave Vienna at present, but shall cling to Stirner like his shadow. I must find proof that he is the murderer here in Vienna, where the murder took place. And you shall help me, Herr Demel, by continually taking me about among the people with whom Stirner associates."

Chapter 9—The First Step

THE first time Grete Rumfort went to the office in her new coat and skirt, after the luncheon hour, far more men than usual turned to look after her; and the glances she cast at the shop windows told her that now for the first time she was beautiful, strikingly beautiful. She wore cobbler Wisloschill's patent-leather shoes on her small feet, gray silk stockings clothe her slim, perfectly-shaped legs, her figure was slender and supple—indeed, not a girl who passed her could be compared with her. The green of the coat and skirt emphasized the pink and white of her complexion and the shining gold of her hair; the little hat perched coquettishly on her charming little head.

Frau Greifer had clothed her from head to foot; everything on her was new, and new, too, was her courage, her joy in herself. Grete felt herself another person—proud, self-confident, self-reliant.

Grete had developed late. When her father died a year before, she was still a shy, angular schoolgirl;

and the year in which she had matured into a beautiful young woman had been so loaded with anxiety and grief that she had never realized what she was becoming. And now for the first time she felt herself a woman, a conqueror, who had a right to make claims on life.

When Grete came to the door of the house where Herr Wöss had his office, she hesitated. What would her men and girl colleagues say—those poor, needy creatures, exploited just as she was, who all wore ragged clothes and tattered shoes as she had done yesterday? And Herr Wöss, that revolting person, how he would stare!

As the girl went up the stairs the whole of her happiness was suddenly dissipated. She realized with terror that she had scarcely a farthing left, that to-morrow there would be want and hunger again at home, that everything she wore was borrowed—in fact, did not belong to her at all, but to that odd, kind and yet, she felt, sinister woman, Frau Greifer.

The clerks in the office opened their eyes and ears wide. They stared at her with looks of admiration, envy and suspicion, but no one said anything; they behaved as though she had been the Fräulein Rumfort of yesterday and not a smartly-dressed young lady, as lovely as a picture, quite out of place in the dirty office with its rickety chairs and rough desks. Grete, too, showed no embarrassment, and

sat down to work as usual at her obsolete typewriter.

Herr Wöss came into the office. He nearly choked when he saw Grete. He looked her up and down with a penetrating stare; then he gave a scornful laugh and, with an eloquent shrug of the shoulders, went into his room.

The slave-owner's scornful laugh had a liberating effect on the slaves, who echoed it tenfold. All of them grinned and flung contemptuous glances at Grete, and one dried-up, sour-faced girl muttered to her neighbor something about cocottes and loose women.

Grete was good-natured and pleasant to everybody, and hitherto she had got on well with all her colleagues; but now for the first time she felt herself on the defensive—against both herself and the others.

Herr Wöss opened the padded door of his private room and called roughly for Grete. When he was alone with her, he began to laugh delightedly.

"Well, you've found a rich lover, I see! You're right, quite right; a pretty little girl like you must be sensible. I'm sorry; I'd have liked to be your first, and I'd have come down handsomely, too; but it doesn't matter, I'm always your good friend. I don't know what jealousy means; I'm content with what I get. So when'll you give me an evening?"

Grete trembled all over with shame and indignation. She stamped on the floor with her foot and cried, bursting into tears:

"Herr Wöss, I cannot let you speak to me like that. You have no right to insult me."

Then something unexpected happened. The lean man, with the drunkard's nose and pimply face pulled her on to his knee and pressed her to his bosom with an embrace of iron.

"There, don't be cross, ducky! I'm as good a man as another, and I like you as you are to-day. You don't want me to believe God sent you those pretty clothes, do you?"

An impudent caress did all that was needed to send Grete nearly mad. She tore herself away with a sudden jerk, struck her chief in the face with her clenched fist, and screamed:

"I won't stay with you an hour longer, you dirty beast!"

She burst out of the room sobbing. Wöss followed and roared after her:

"Get out of this, you slut! I won't have any low wenches in my office, who strut along in velvet and silk. Those clothes are all right for street-walkers, but not among decent people. You are dismissed without notice. And mind you pay back your advance soon, or I'll prosecute you!"

Grete no longer heard the slaves' approving mur-

mur. She had taken her coat and hat and hurried away without once looking up. And as she stood outside in the November fog, the world she saw through her thickly falling tears seemed no longer beautiful and full of hope, but gray, dismal, desperate.

Mechanically, as in a dream, Grete walked through the Inner City, crossed the outer Burghof and passed along the edge of the Volksgarten, making for her home. She did not feel the men's eyes which followed her, took their fill of her. To all her thoughts there was but one gloomy refrain: "What shall I do now, what shall I do now; where shall I get money from?" A vast self-pity overcame her, a feeling of defenselessness and loneliness. Grandpapa would bluster and talk big and tell stories of Custozza; Mamma, poor soul, whose brain had been softened by all her anxieties, would weep and lament; Erich, dear little boy, would cling to Mamma's apron and cry with her. And Else—Grete shut her eyes and an unspeakable fear ran through her. She was worried about Else; she had become so strange of late, not a bit like a child of thirteen. Only yesterday she had said she did not for a moment mean to go to school in rags any longer; she had swayed to and fro from the hips and declared, with a shrill precocious laugh, that she knew quite well there were plenty of men who

would give a girl money and nice things, even if she were only thirteen. . . .

Grete felt her heart in her mouth as she turned into the Melchiorgasse, which seemed to her to-day more dismal and repulsive than ever. A joyless alley, full of ugly people, poverty and crime.

She looked up at the windows of No. 55 and shuddered. There, behind that curtain, a beautiful young woman had been strangled, who had all life could offer that was brilliant and splendid, and yet was not content with her lot, but had slunk hither from her rich, luxurious home to die by a murderer's hand in the joyless alley.

Grete stopped outside No. 56, then made a rapid decision and entered. Perhaps Frau Greifer, who had been so kind to her, would be able to give her some advice. Yes, she was sure that that experienced woman, who knew so many people, would help her, would secure her a new post.

Frau Greifer led Grete into a large drawing-room, decorated in quite good taste, and containing some old furniture. A comfortable warmth emanated from the broad Dutch-tile stove. Grete looked round in surprise. She noticed that there were a disproportionately large number of chairs in the big room, three sofas in a row along the wall, and a kind of dais by the piano, in front of the window, which was screened by thick curtains.

Frau Greifer intercepted the girl's look and remarked indifferently:

"I often give little evenings, with singing and dancing, for my customers. They bring their men friends with them, and we have a very gay time. I'll ask you, too, next time, Fräulein Grete; but I must make you a pretty evening dress first."

"I'm afraid there's no chance of that, Frau Greifer! Look at me, a poor out-of-work office-girl, who has just been fired!"

Frau Greifer listened to Grete's story in silence, gently caressing the girl's arms and breast. Then she nodded.

"Yes," she said; "that's what a pretty girl has to put up with when she's poor. But you needn't worry about it at all. We'll put things right again; only trust me, and I'll find you a nice rich friend, who'll treat you well."

Grete gave a shudder.

"I won't sell myself, Frau Greifer. I'd rather drown myself. I'm not an ignorant girl any more; I know the facts of life. But the thought of letting a disgusting creature—no, Frau Greifer, I simply couldn't do it, even if I wanted to—I'd run away at the last moment."

The dressmaker interrupted her.

"There's no question of disgusting creatures, Fräulein Grete! I mean a smart, good-looking man, whom you'll like. And there's no need for you

to give him more than you want to, none at all. Men don't want everything all at once, nowadays. If you know how to set about it, you can keep him at arm's length as long as you like. I know a nice man, tall and good-looking; his name is Löhner and he is fearfully rich. If you know how to treat him, you can get millions, jewels, pearls, clothes—anything you like—out of him. Only trust me, Fräulein Grete, I'll make your fortune all right. If I hadn't been quite sure of that, I wouldn't have lent you all that money for the clothes. I'm a poor woman myself, and have to see that I get my money."

Grete felt the claws emerging from the paws of the cat which had just been flattering and caressing her. Another shiver of fear came over her, but at the same time the will to live revived in her. Millions, clothes, jewels—and all, perhaps, in exchange for a casual kiss, bestowed by her lips, but not her heart. Pooh! she did not mind risking that—it could be washed off with soap and water, like soot!

The door-bell had rung, and Fräulein Henriette came in with two smartly-dressed young ladies. One was a majestic brunette, a real Juno, the other a dainty, doll-like little person. Both wore fur coats, which they now took off, revealing very *décolleté* evening dresses and many jewels.

Frau Greifer introduced them.

"Fräulein Lona and little Fräulein Gisi. This is Fräulein Grete, who is now in serious trouble. I shall be able to help her; she can count on me, can't she?"

The dignified Lona and the dainty Gisi nodded, without any great enthusiasm, and looked at Grete inquisitively and a trifle ironically. Then Lona turned to Frau Greifer.

"Well, Mummy, are we going to have fun to-night? I want money—heaps of money!"

Frau Greifer winked, and hastened to conduct Grete into the front room.

"Two charming ladies! And they had just as bad a time as you, till they put themselves in my hands. To-day they drive in cars and live like princesses. Only don't be silly, Fräulein Grete, and we shall both be satisfied!"

Grete's pulse beat quicky. Her brain was awhirl; she did not know what was happening around her; she could not, and did not want to understand why in this house ladies had only Christian names. She was so mentally exhausted that she could hardly think and act for herself; she could only just pluck up courage to whisper shamefacedly to Frau Greifer that she would be grateful for a loan of fifty thousand crowns.

The dressmaker's eyes shone. She gave Grete the sum she asked for, but added that she too was

short of money and could not do anything more. She would, however, introduce her to Herr Löhner one afternoon very shortly, at a cheery tea-party, and if only Grete knew how to play her cards, all her troubles would be at an end.

Grete nodded. She had already had a feeling that she was no longer her own property, that she had no will of her own, that she was mortgaged. And yet she no longer felt so desperate as two hours before. The crisis was averted for one day, and then —Frau Greifer would help. And at any rate, tomorrow she could have her sleep out; she had not to go to Herr Wöss's awful office any more.

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Chapter 10—A Bear Movement

JAN HOLM, Moritz Zipperer and Joe Brownstone sat together drawing up a plan of campaign.

Jan Holm was a banker and manufacturer on a large scale, and a prominent director of some dozens of companies. Moritz Zipperer, from Czernowitz, had five years earlier been a dealer in lubricating oil, and was to-day one of the leading speculators on the Stock Exchange. Joe Brownstone, whose correct name was Johann Braunstein, was an American.

The three had just agreed to sell—to dispose of a large quantity of the shares they held at the high prices then quoted. Mr. Brownstone was the principal speaker.

"Since the papers have begun to talk about industrial shares standing unreasonably high," he said, "the public has begun to be nervous. We must anticipate it; more good news must come, so that we can sell at a high price. I've got an idea. A New

York telegram must appear to-morrow in the chief financial paper saying that the Morgan banking firm is beginning to interest itself in Austrian industry and is buying blocks of shares. Pierpont Morgan is on his way to Greenland in his yacht, and his managing director, Cuning, is seriously ill; so that it will be a long time before a denial can come. In the meantime we shall have time to sell either in a steady market or on a rise. Later on, when everything has fallen by 40 per cent, we can get in again."

Holm and Zipperer nodded approval. Zipperer cried excitedly: "Let me do the business! We must be cautious—use a hundred agents—operate in the dark as long as possible!"

Holm pretended to be tired and sleepy. In reality he was thinking how he could outwit the other two. At any rate, to-morrow he would unload his Krieglach timber shares, which stood inordinately high. He smiled involuntarily. Who was that little climber—wasn't his name Stirner, or something like that?—who had followed his lead in buying, operated in his shadow? Yes; he was an employee of the Central European Bank. Well, he ought to stick quietly to his profession and content himself with a bite now and again at the fruit of the poisonous tree. It was no longer so easy as it had been to become a billionaire; those days were over.

The details of the countermining campaign to be undertaken were settled. Holm, in whose office the conversation was taking place, sent for drinks, and they chatted for another half-hour. The American told them of a deal by which a friend of his named O'Reilly had made millions without any trouble after the Revolution.

"In December, 1918," he said, "O'Reilly went to Paris and visited the French lines. And what did he see in the trenches? They were paved with corned beef tins—yes; literally paved with them. We had sent the *poilus* corned beef in such huge quantities that they could find no better use for the full tins than to make floors for their trenches and dug-outs with them. A splendid idea! An iron floor, perfectly dry. Now the trenches and dug-outs were empty, and in them lay hundreds of thousands of rusty tins, which the *poilus* had slept on for months. Just then the Austrians were telling the whole world about their famine, children were dying like flies in Vienna, and President Renner was taking the hat round to all the other countries. Well, O'Reilly went straight to a French official in the Quartermaster-General's department, gave him a fat bribe and got permission to remove the preserved meat tins from all the trenches for a ridiculously small sum. And what do you think he did with them? Sold them to the Austrians at

fabulous prices! They went for them like flies to a honey-pot, and they were very grateful, too. Ugh! it gave me the shivers to think of the mud and filth and blood which had flooded that pavement of beef tins for weeks on end! But people will eat anything when they're starving. Anyhow, O'Reilly made something like a million dollars out of it."

Jan Holm had one of his sentimental impulses, and if he had followed its promptings he would have hit the American over the head with a whiskey bottle. But he managed to restrain himself, and contented himself with declaring the sitting at an end.

A few days after this conference a slump set in on the Stock Exchange. At first the market was "dull," then "weak," and then the shares began to fall more and more rapidly. Suddenly it was announced that a few big speculators had flung whole blocks of shares on to the market, and the downhill movement became a mad rush. The fall in timber shares was the heaviest of all, especially Krieglach timber. This security fell by 100,000 in one day, by 80,000 the next, and before a fortnight had passed the shares stood 50 per cent. below the price at which Egon Stirner had bought them.

One day this new star in the Stock Exchange firmament was able to take his pencil and work out a simple calculation to the effect that his original

fortune and his winnings, amounting to treble that sum, had gone the way of all earthly things, and that he would once more have to live on the salary of three and a half million crowns a month which he received from the Central European Bank. Moreover, Generaldirektor Rosenow took him to task:

"I hear that you have had heavy losses," he said severely. "I hope you are covered. But I must tell you that I don't like my immediate associates to speculate heavily."

That afternoon Stirner danced with Regina Rosenow in the Bristol Bar, and as she yielded with less and less resistance, to the fierce pressure of his arms, his decision was made: he must win Regina and become Rosenow's son-in-law!

Chapter 11—Herr Löhner

A SENSATION was caused by an article in the *Vienna Herald*. It dealt with the murder in the Melchiorgasse, and reported that a fresh clew had been obtained.

"Months have passed," it ran, "and the murderer of the unhappy Frau Lia Leid is still undiscovered. Seldom has a case presented such difficulties from the detective point of view. The lady left nothing behind her which could permit of any conclusion as to the criminal's identity being arrived at. That he was her lover is certain. But none of the men who belonged to Frau Leid's circle of acquaintances can be suspected. Only two persons saw the murderer—the landlady, Frau Merkel, and a cobbler's apprentice. Frau Merkel knows nothing except that the man is tall and wore a pointed beard and a pince-nez. She never saw his features, as each time she had a conversation with him he stood in the dark. The apprentice saw him come and go, both with and without beard and pince-nez. But

he, too, is unable to describe the man's face, and says he would hardly know him again if he were confronted with him.

"What makes the work of the police extraordinarily difficult is that the murderer is probably a well-educated man belonging to what is called good society, and not a professional criminal. The latter have their hiding-places and taverns where they congregate, and these are known to the police. Moreover, they almost always hasten to sell the proceeds of their theft and so betray themselves. The Melchiorgasse murderer, on the other hand, certainly had no accomplices, frequented no criminal taverns, and is unlikely to have hastened to sell the jewels.

"All this makes more interesting and worthy of recognition the fact that the Vienna Security Police, which is under the direction of that official of proved ability, Hofrat Schmitz, has nevertheless found a clew which, it is hoped, will lead to the murderer's arrest in the very near future. In the interests of the case we are unable to give further particulars to-day; we can only say that the tracks which the police are following lead eastward. Viennese police officers are at this moment at work in Bucharest, and the quarry they are hunting is a noble one. If an arrest takes place, there will be a

tremendous sensation in the best society of the Rumanian capital."

This article was by Otto Demel, and there was not a word of truth in it. It had been composed after long deliberation with Horak, in order to give the murderer a feeling of security, to lull him into the belief that the police were on a false track and that the possibility of his, the real murderer, being discovered was *nil.*

Otto Demel had once shown, in an article which had attracted much notice, how the smallest, in themselves most trivial occurrences often change and determine the fate of a human being—indeed of a whole people. He was now to have personal experience of the truth of this observation.

When he came home on the day on which his article on Frau Lia Leid's murder had appeared, an unpleasant surprise was in store for him. He had lived for many years in two furnished rooms in an old lady's house in the Wieden district. The lady now begged him, with outstretched hands and almost in tears, to refrain from taking advantage of the law protecting tenants and to leave voluntarily. Her son-in-law, who lived with her daughter in Czechoslovakia, could get an excellent post in Vienna, but she had searched in vain for a flat for the married couple, and had no choice but to lay claim to her own two rooms.

The journalist was filled with consternation at the news, but was too sensible not to see that the request was justifiable. Reluctantly, fully realizing how hard it would be for him to find new rooms, he declared himself ready to move as soon as he found himself anything in the least suitable.

The very next day he had an advertisement in the *Herald* inquiring for at least one well-furnished, spotlessly clean room, with use of bath. He received ten answers. Six were from house agents, offering their services in return for payment in advance, and three from single *"middle-aged"* ladies, who had no bathroom, but, to compensate for this deficiency, were willing to bestow favors of another kind on a male lodger. Only one offer appeared to be genuine, and the handwriting and style of this made an agreeable impression on Demel. It invited him to inspect a large, well-furnished room, which hitherto had been the family's living-room. The address, however, reduced the journalist to a state of blank astonishment. It was: 58 Melchiorgasse, third floor, flat 8.

"The devil," Demel muttered to himself, "in that disgusting, miserable street, and quite close to the house where my poor friend's wife was murdered, too!"

But then he remembered that the house exactly opposite the house where the crime had taken place

had made a thoroughly good impression on him, an impression of respectability. Perhaps that was No. 58. For that matter, he had no choice. Accordingly, he went on to the address indicated. When he read on the door of flat 8 the name "Alois von Rumfort, k.k. Regierungsrat," he realized the position. They were people who had seen better days, and now, under the pressure of circumstances, had had to decide to let a room.

Indeed, this decision had been made only as a last resort. Despite all her efforts, Grete could find no post. She answered all advertisements which seemed in the least suitable, but for every vacancy of the kind there were a hundred competitors. The managing clerk of a ready-made clothes establishment was anxious to engage her; but, as he quite frankly declared, only on condition that she became his mistress. When she expressed her indignation, he observed with a shrug of the shoulders that it made no difference whether it were he or someone else. As Grete thought otherwise, she could not obtain the position.

For some days nothing was heard from Frau Greifer; then she invited the girl to tea to introduce her to Herr Löhner. Grete had a hard struggle before she decided to accept the invitation. At last her necessity, which was growing greater every day, and her feminine curiosity overcame

her scruples. She put on her new dress and went to Frau Greifer, who received her with the words:

"Now, don't you be silly, Fräulein Grete; he's here already, and I've made him quite mad about you. Be good, and your fortune's made; you'll be swimming in money, and you'll be able to let me have mine back."

Then she led Grete Rumfort into a strangely-furnished room. It was completely dominated by an enormous sofa covered with cushions, above which hung a picture of Leda with the swan. On a little table lay some portfolios, the leaves of which Herr Löhner, with a very red face, was turning over. The large table in the middle had a white cloth on it. There were cakes and bottles containing liquors of various kinds.

Frau Greifer introduced Grete and then left her alone with Herr Löhner. He was a tall, strongly-built man, with a bull neck and little, deep-set pig's eyes in a round face; and seemed to be above five-and-forty. He held out his powerful hand, covered with black hair and many diamond rings, to Grete and gave a rumbling bass laugh.

"Well, Frau Greifer didn't exaggerate. You're as lovely as a picture, a regular princess. I think we shall get on well together, don't you? It won't be my fault if we don't. I'm good-natured, as docile as you could want, and generous into the bargain.

Money makes no difference to me. But, Fräulein Grete, is it really true that you've never done anything of this kind before? Frau Greifer declares you've not; but I can't believe it—you're so lovely."

Grete trembled all over and longed to run away. This coarse giant with his thick, swollen lips frightened her, and his question brought a rush of blood to her cheeks. But perhaps he was not really so bad, and he had declared that money did not matter to him. The words "don't be silly" rang in her ears, and for a fraction of a second she realized her terrible position; she remembered that there was nothing for supper that evening but a quarter of a loaf of bread. And she owed Frau Greifer money—a lot of money; rent day was close at hand, and Else had not gone to school that day, because her only frock, which could not be lengthened any further, hardly came down to her knees, and had earned her a rebuke from the mistress.

Grete pulled herself together and stammered:

"Herr Löhner, please don't forget that you are in the presence of a lady. Otherwise, I must deprive myself of the pleasure of your company."

Löhner semed highly delighted at this answer. He rubbed his hands together gleefully, asked Grete to sit down, handed her coffee and cakes and said, hoarse with excitement:

"I'm glad you're so strict, that's what I like. Do as you please. If I misbehave again, scold me like a boy and threaten to box my ears, then I'll be as good as gold."

Grete, in the inexperience of her short seventeen years, had no idea what Herr Löhner was driving at, and found his words so amusing that she laughed out loud. During tea Löhner behaved quite decently, asked her about her family, made sure that she was neither engaged nor had a "friend," and seemed quite impressed when he heard that she had nearly taken a degree.

Grete was gay and cheerful. This Herr Löhner certainly semed to be very good-natured—and rich, very rich. Frau Greifer had told her that she need not compromise herself in any way. Very good, she would try to make him very much in love with her, and then he would certainly help her without asking anything in return.

After tea he asked Grete politely to sit down by his side on the sofa. He had already taken one of the portfolios from the little table. And now he moved close up to the girl, began to breathe heavily, opened the portfolio and held out the first picture to Grete. The girl grew rigid with horror. She pushed the picture aside and tried to jump up. But Löhner held her fast in an iron grip and pressed his swollen lips to her cheek and neck,

stammering in a hoarse voice confused words the real significance of which she completely failed to understand.

At last, with great difficulty, Grete succeeded in tearing herself from his grasp, and ran out of the room to Frau Greifer.

"The man is crazy, Frau Greifer; how could you ask me to stay in a room alone with him?"

The claws appeared again.

"Don't make a fuss, Fräulein Grete; a poor girl can't be too particular."

Then, as she saw Grete burst into a wild fit of sobbing, she intervened:

"There, I'll tell Herr Löhner that he's not the right man for you. There are plenty of gentlemen who'll be glad to make your acquaintance. You go quietly off home; and I'll let you know when I've found somebody."

Grete dried her tears and went home. She scarcely felt now that she was walking on a quicksand, but waited, in her bitter need, till the "right man" came along.

As things could not continue as they were, she decided at last to take the measure so often contemplated and every time rejected—to let the pretty, comfortable living-room, so that her mother, grandfather, brother and sister and herself would have only the two bedrooms.

Otto Demel was agreeably surprised when he entered Grete's presence. He was touched by her still childish beauty, and could not avert his gaze from the delicate face with its large cornflower-colored eyes, till he saw that the girl was blushing.

He liked the big room, with its old-fashioned furniture dating from the good old days of bourgeois comfort. In reply to a question of his, Grete eagerly assured him that a good, clean bed would be put into the room. She added with a smile: "I can sleep very well in the same bed with my little sister."

Demel refused, declaring that he would rather get a camp-bed for himself, as he preferred to have something that looked like a sitting-room, at least during the daytime. When he asked the price of the room, including breakfast, Grete showed some embarrassment, was silent for a moment or two, and finally named a sum which was ridiculously low under the existing conditions.

Demel shook his head.

"You won't make your fortune like this, Fräulein! Nowadays a moderately decent room usually costs twice what you ask, and this one is not moderately decent, but very nice indeed. And, as I have no intention of exploiting feminine ignorance, I'll pay twice the sum you are asking. I'll move in to-morrow or the day after."

Grete went to the window and looked after the new lodger. What a pleasant, frank, cheery man this Herr Otto Demel was! And how nice of him to offer to pay more than she had asked! She wondered what his profession was; but she would see that when he filled up the form.

She hummed gayly to herself as she went into the next room, in which the other members of the family were waiting eagerly. But none of them were pleased except little Else.

"What a nice-looking man! I had a peep at him through the keyhole. You like him, too. I see! Your cheeks are quite red. Do you think he'll pay for the whole month in advance? If he does, I must get a frock!"

Grandpapa raged and blustered, declaring that the man who had robbed him of his sitting-room should be flung out the day the monarchy was restored, and mamma wept bitterly.

"We've become quite ordinary poor people! Fancy having to live all day in rooms with beds in them! Oh, dear; if only we'd all died when my poor husband did!"

Grete's short-lived pleasure had vanished; once more life seemed to her dreadful and unbearable. She remembered with horror that nothing had been ordered for dinner and that a few hundred crowns comprised her whole fortune. She looked

round her in desperation. Yes, now she would have to take that beautiful seventeenth-century candlestick to the second-hand dealer and fling it away for a wretched price.

The door-bell rang. Else ran out, and Otto Demel followed her in, slightly embarrassed. He now saw the whole family assembled before him for the first time.

"I had quite forgotten to pay the usual sum down. I think I had better pay the month's rent in advance. And, besides that, I should like to say something. I should not like to think that you were going to be unduly cramped for space. My profession compels me to keep certain hours. I don't get up till about ten; then I go out; in the afternoon I am in my room from two to four at latest, and I don't come home again till late at night. So my room will be at your disposal from four o'clock till getting on for midnight."

Demel kissed Frau von Rumfort's hand, and Grete showed him out. He held her hand in his longer than social observance demands, pressed it hard and said, looking full into her glowing face:

"I hope we shall become good friends!"

Chapter 12—Back to the Joyless Alley

THERE was a fresh excitement in the Melchiorgasse. All the skinny, slovenly women, who assembled every morning outside the house doors with their half-filled tattered shopping-bags and argued interminably, were whispering to one another:

"The Lechners' Marie has come home."

Horrible details of the condition in which she had been discharged from hospital were narrated.

"The girl's a perfect wreck; she's lost a lot of teeth and looks like a corpse."

"Not a kreuzer and no clothes. Nice for the Lechners!"

"They say she takes morphine. Serves her right. A fine lady for three years and then the hospital! That's what happens to dirty wenches who think of nothing but men!"

"Don't talk rubbish! She's had bad luck, poor girl! She was young and pretty, and wanted to get out of these slums. That's no sin!"

While public opinion was thus being vented in various tones, Marie Lechner, well-known for three years in night life of Vienna, lay on a tattered straw mattress in a dark little room next the kitchen of a fourth-floor flat in No. 54, the wretched tenement house—alone, deserted, feverish, yearning for a drink which no one could give her.

She was a perfect example of the Viennese slum girl who has had the fortune or misfortune to be beautiful. Her father had once been an honest, hard-working laborer; now he was a relic of the war, with one leg, one arm, a broken jaw and an empty eye-socket. He was just a fragment of a man, half brutalized by his life in the trenches, in a prisoners' camp, in hospitals. The one pleasure left him was alcohol, and he spent on drink every farthing of the pittance which was all the State could give him.

Her mother was an old woman, though hardly forty-two. She left the house early in the morning to wash for strangers, and crawled on to her straw mattress late in the evening. In the night she was awakened by the returning roysterer, had to help him undress, as he could not manage it alone, and was grateful if a tender impulse moved him to pass her the bottle—still more so, if he refrained from pounding her miserable dried-up body with the fist of his remaining arm.

Their only child Marie had grown up amid the misery and privations of the war—a lovely creature, tall, slender and well-made, with a red, sensuous mouth that asked to be kissed, masses of chestnut hair and lively gray eyes, full of fire. Yet she carefully avoided the men and lads of the neighborhood, unlike her contemporaries, who at twelve were initiated into all the mysteries of love.

But her time came. After the war Marie, now a girl of seventeen, was sent to a commercial school —with the aid of a well-to-do cousin in the country —and had just taken up a post in an office, when she made the acquaintance of a man of fashion, who seduced her. Later she met an obliging woman who introduced her into the champagne restaurants, bars and night clubs. Three years ago Marie had disappeared from her mother's little room, and appeared in the world of pleasure as "beautiful Mary." She was seen in motor-cars, at the races, in boxes at music-halls. She had a flat not far from 54 Melchiorgasse, and yet worlds away from her parents' dwelling. A hundred times and more her mother said enviously, but with a tenderness in her voice:

"Marie's well off! She goes with gentlemen who spend heaps of money on her, and drinks more champagne than we do malt coffee. I never see her, but people tell me about her."

And now destitute and ailing she was back with her mother in the Melchiorgasse, spitting blood on to the rag which served her for a pillow.

Frau Lechner never knew just what had happened to Mary, or Marie as she was now called again. The girl had been brought home from the Women's Hospital. She had laughed wildly and whispered hoarsely:

"I can't get away from the Melchiorgasse; the damned slum's got me again. Mother, you must write on the wooden cross on my grave: 'Born, strayed, and died in the Melchiorgasse.'"

At the sight of the bundle of misery that had once been his daughter, even the disabled soldier had become sober. He had not cursed or struck a blow, but gripped his wife's hand and listened dumbly as Marie screamed aloud in her dreams and stammered disconnected words.

Next day there was an even greater sensation in the Melchiorgasse. As Frau Lechner came home in the evening from her washing she met, outside No. 56, Frau Greifer in the act of getting into a taxi-cab, her fat body enveloped in a fur coat. The washerwoman rushed at her with a piercing scream of rage and cried, in a voice that could be heard in all the neighboring houses:

"Damned slut, you wear furs and drive in a car, and my poor girl rotting alive on a straw mattress!

You ought to be in jail, you procuress, who sell our children! I'll have you run in, you dirty drab, you!"

The taxi-driver prevented Frau Lechner from assaulting Frau Greifer, and the washerwoman, pursued by bawling children, crept to her lodging to make soup with an egg for Mary—now called Marie by the world, but Maritscherl by her mother, as in her earliest days. The bones for the soup had been presented to her by the cook of the house where she went to do washing; the egg she had, strictly speaking, stolen. Surely God, who, we are told, sees everything, smiled amiably upon this theft.

Early next morning—it was a Sunday, when no washing is done—Fräulein Henriette, the manageress of Frau Greifer's dressmaking establishment, came to see Frau Lechner, shuddered at the sight of the sick girl, crossed herself and then began to talk emphatically to the mother. The upshot of the conversation was that Frau Lechner received 50,000 crown notes. These she immediately buried in the depths of her straw mattress to prevent her husband—who at the moment was sleeping—from finding them. She then accompanied Fräulein Henriette to the door and sent a civil message by her to Frau Greifer.

Poor people cannot enjoy the luxury of injured honor and vengeance; that, too, is for the rich alone.

Chapter 13—Lucrezia Borgia's Guest

DR. KARL LEID, the solicitor, sat in his office with a lady opposite him. Though no longer in the first bloom of youth, Frau Liane Christens was still a beautiful woman—very beautiful, indeed. A few silvery threads in her black hair only enhanced its beauty; the serious, almost classical face hardly showed a wrinkle, and snow-white teeth, rather too large, perhaps, flashed in her well-shaped mouth. Frau Christens, wife of the famous Viennese portrait-painter, Aristo Christens, was thirty-five, but her supple figure, slim and yet well-shaped, would have done credit to a girl of twenty-five.

She listened to the solicitor's embittered words with an amiable, motherly smile.

"What you tell me," he said, "completely disconcerts me. I always regarded your marriage as a model: I was always glad to be with you and your husband; your home was always, to me, a disproof of the assertion that the companionship of marriage must have a destructive effect on highly intellectual

people. And now you, too, come, to join the hundreds who have sat in that chair before you and cried: 'Release me from the fetters of marriage!' "

"You are mistaken, Dr. Leid, I don't cry and I don't talk about fetters. I still love my husband, and that is just why I must leave him; I do not wish to torment him with my love, or to see the day on which my love might turn to hate.

"I really came to see Dr. Leid as a solicitor only, but I see that I owe Dr. Leid an explanation as a human being, too. So I will tell you why I must be divorced from Aristo Christens.

"We were married just eighteen years ago. I was an innocent creature of seventeen, brought up in a convent, he a rising star of the art world, was ten years older than I. Although I was a rich heiress, it was purely a love marriage on his side as well as mine. In the first years of our life together I was everything to him—his idol, his beloved, his model, his adviser, the only critic whose judgment he valued. Then what was bound to happen happened. The popular painter—loved and admired by women for his art, his intellect, his manly beauty—was unfaithful to me. I saw it, and—did not suffer unduly. I saw that a man like Christens must have variety in love as in other things, if he was not to grow depressed and lose his mental powers. So I shut both eyes to what was going on, and made no

scenes; only I always went to my own bedroom when he had one of his flames in the house. At last, one night he came to my door, begged vehemently to be let in, knelt down before me, buried his head in my lap and asked me to forgive him. For a time after that he belonged once more to me, and to me only.

"Things went on like this for years on end, and as our sex relations became looser our comradeship became proportionately stronger. This, too, I accepted as a matter of course. A woman exhausts herself, a man renews his strength! Nature herself meant it to be so. Our marriage was a childless one. That counted for something, too; it can be understood that my husband, whom no one called father, felt himself eternally young.

"Perhaps our married life would have continued peacefully and prosperously till our silver wedding and on to our golden wedding, if Fate had not intervened a few months ago in the shape of a young Danish baroness, who has come to live in Vienna with her parents. She is a lovely child, and Aristo fell in love with her with all the strength and passion of a mature—indeed, middle-aged man. She is twenty-five years younger than he. It is no flirtation or philandering, or even a minor liaison, but a great, overwhelming passion, which is entirely reciprocated. And that I cannot bear; it makes my

heart bleed. Besides, I love Aristo so much that I will not stand in the way of his new happiness, his new-found youth: I can't stand discussions, Dr. Leid, and I have not said a word to my husband about my decision. I have only expressed a wish to go to Italy alone for a few weeks. Aristo could almost have shouted for joy when I told him. That, too, I can understand; for it must be painful and difficult to live with a bad conscience in the same house as a woman one has loved.

"I ask you, therefore, Dr. Leid, to take in my absence the necessary steps for a dissolution of our marriage. I will gladly take all the blame on myself. You can call it desertion or what you like. I shall write to my husband fully from Venice, telling him the reasons for my determination."

Dr. Leid had listened, deeply moved. With an instinctive movement he took the delicate, white, slender hand in his own, kissed it, and said:

"And what do you mean to do after the separation?"

"Well, I expect I shall be very lonely and solitary. But I shall keep a few friends at any rate, and I hope you will be one of them."

Her lips were quivering now. Karl Leid looked into her face with warm sympathy. He saw in it the reflection of his own grief.

Frau Liane Christens sprang up suddenly.

"I must go home and dress for the artist's ball. I expect you know that my husband and a number of other painters have organized a great fancy-dress ball at the Künstlerhaus. 'Lucrezia Borgia's Guests,' it is called. He would be hurt and offended if I were not there."

The painters had decorated the great hall of the Künstlerhaus quite in the style of the days of the Borgias. The whole of Viennese society was there. The display of color in the costumes, the violet silk of the cardinals, the white-laced robes of the higher clergy and the officials of the Papal court, adorned with gold and silver embroidery, made a bewitching spectacle. All over the hall waved the banners of the Borgias, the cities of Rome and Naples and the house of Aragon.

The ladies, too, of course, had done their best to add to the splendor of the scene. Wonderful period costumes of velvet and silk clung close about the figures of beautiful women, whose dresses, according to the custom of those days, were cut as low as possible at the neck, bosom and back. The room was a tossing sea of diamonds and other jewels, waving feathers, ivory and flowers.

Regina Rosenow, as Lucrezia Borgia, was sinfully beautiful. She wore a white dress embroidered with pearls; her ruddy curls hung loose, and, indeed, she looked as seductive as her famous prototype of ill-

repute. Egon Stirner, in a nobleman's dress, was almost continually in her company, while Otto Demel, his companion Horak, alias Hort, and many other men had contented themselves with noting the Borgia style *en passant.*

The painter, Aristo Christens, looked splendid as Cæsar Borgia, and his wife, who was present at the ball for his sake, made a sensation by her aristocratic beauty as a noblewoman of the Court of Aragon.

Regina Rosenow was so completely fascinated that evening by Egon Stirner that she was almost curtly snubbing in her manner towards all the men who approached her to pay homage. The handsome slender man appealed to her senses; her instinct scented in him her true mate. Natural selection, working subconsciously, drew her to him.

He made good use of his power; he wooed her with eloquent, seductive words and expressive eyes.

Suddenly, almost abruptly, Regina looked him full in the face and said, with an appearance of perfect coolness:

"I should never care to tie myself to a man for good and all till I knew him in the fullest sense of the word. I shall go to Semmering with my maid the day after to-morrow, saying I need a rest. I shall order a suite at the Hotel Panhans to-morrow. See that your rooms are not too far from

mine. You're sure to be able to get a week's holiday."

For a moment Stirner was speechless with astonishment at this open invitation; then he pressed her hot, trembling hand to his lips. Regina regained her composure.

"By the way, papa told me that you had to hand over all the money you won on the Stock Exchange. Is that true?"

"Not quite; I kept some of it. And even if I'd lost it? Isn't money floating about the world in billions? Believe me, I shall cast my net again and get a big haul."

"The metaphor is not a fortunate one, Egon! I couldn't help thinking of myself just now as a goldfish flapping about in your net. But, after all, I'm slippery, and every net has meshes."

While two human beings were thus moving onward towards their fate, the journalist Otto Demel, his friend, the bogus country gentleman Hort, and Frau Liane Christens were sitting together at a little table over a bottle of champagne. Their conversation turned first on Frau Christens's impending trip to Italy, then on Dr. Leid.

"I saw him to-day," she said, "for the first time since that terrible thing happened, and I was horrified. He looks miserable, and seems unable to get over the business. He is one of the best and kindest

men I know, and it hurts me to see him suffering so."

Otto Demel nodded.

"It is not only that he cannot forget his unhappy wife, but the thought that the murderer is going about unpunished causes him endless torment. Only the other day he seriously assured me that he would gladly give his whole fortune if it would help to discover the murderer."

Horak had followed our conversation in silence; but his eyes flitted restlessly here and there, fixing themselves alternately on Frau Christens's delicate features and on a wonderful pearl necklace which hung about her slender neck and fair bosom. For a moment he pressed his hand to his forehead, then he made his decision.

"I see, Frau Christens," he said, "that you are a good friend of Dr. Leid's. Moreover, though I have known you scarcely half an hour, I have the impression that you are a person of quite unusual intelligence and absolutely worthy of confidence. I have, therefore, decided to throw off the mask. My name is not Hort, and I own no land; I am just a detective, Josef Horak. Herr Demel has been kind enough to take me about among his friends. I am on somebody's track—and that somebody is Lia Leid's murderer. So, Frau Christens, let me put a question to you, and I beg you to answer it honestly, openly

and fearlessly: would you shun personal efforts and sacrifices, perhaps even dangers, if they might lead to the capture of Lia Leid's murderer?"

Frau Christens had flushed slightly. She replied firmly, and with animation:

"No, certainly not! No sacrifice would be too great for me, if I could free Dr. Leid, whom I so revere and esteem as a man and as a friend, from his mental suffering."

"Then I beg you to place yourself at the service of the cause as a volunteer detective. You are going to Italy the day after to-morrow. You say that you mean to start from Venice and make a round tour of all the towns worth seeing. You say, too, that you speak Italian, not perfectly, but very well. Above all—and that is the most important thing from my point of view—you have a magnificent pearl necklace, very valuable indeed, if I am not mistaken. That is so, is it not? Good. It will be your task to search for the murderer with the help of your pearls —in Venice, Milan, Florence, and, if need be, Rome as well. It won't be easy. You will have to play a part in these cities—the part of an adventuress! I see that, unlike all the other ladies here, you do not use rouge or lipstick. In Venice, Milan, Florence and Rome you will have to do so at times—so heavily that, if at the same time you dress conspicuously enough, everyone will take you for one

of those traveling adventuresses who possess jewels one day, have to sell them the next, and might fairly be suspected of doing little deals with criminals. I must work out precise instructions myself, and, if you will allow me, will send them to you to-morrow."

Otto Demel could not help thinking how like a film, life was. Frau Liane's face lit up with pleasure and excitement. She held out her hand to the detective, and said, with genuine enthusiasm:

"It's not I who will be doing you a service, but you me! To be quite frank, I was a little afraid of this journey, which had no real object except to distract my mind, And now it has a real object, and is full of mysteries and adventures—and I am to have them on someone else's account!"

Chapter 14—The Girl Trap

OTTO DEMEL was very comfortable in his new home. There was nothing to suggest that he was in regular lodgings; he lived in an atmosphere of *bourgeois* respectability, any little request he made was willingly complied with, and his writing-table was kept in order. And whenever he saw Grete, her charm delighted him.

A genuine comradeship had sprung up between the two. He lent her books and enjoyed hearing her intelligent comments on them. Often, when he came home in the afternoon, he spent the whole two hours talking to her, though they were supposed to be working hours; and when she sat opposite him and looked at him questioningly with her big, beautiful eyes, he felt that Grete was the ideal girl he had dreamed of in his youth.

The journalist had lived a very dissipated life in the past few years; he had associated almost exclusively with people who had adopted the standards of their day and flung overboard old-

fashioned ideas of morality. His many and varied experiences with the women and girls of the "new society" were not calculated to make him set a very high value on modern femininity. He saw around him no unions which were not unhappy, inwardly shattered; indeed, the ease with which the conquest of young maried women was achieved inspired in him a positive fear of marriage. Lia Leid and Regina Rosenow were, for him, the typical modern married woman and the typical modern girl.

Nevertheless, at times he began to have an idea that Grete Rumfort was of a different stamp, that she was not like those other girls, who seemed to him a compound of so many unattractive qualities —greedy, coquettish, *blasé* and frivolous. But he always repressed thoughts of this kind, and told himself he was a fool not to seize the opportunity and try to make the lovely, fascinating little thing his mistress.

Whenever he sat close at her side in their hours of intimate talk, and he was tempted to take her in his arms, he was restrained by a curious shyness which he himself could not explain. Memories of his little sister, long dead, and of his mother rose in his mind and made him positively timid in his relations with the child, poor and helpless as she was.

He had no idea of Grete's anxieties, of her des-

perate struggle against the powers of darkness which were stretching out their claws to capture her. Nor had he any notion that he himself was the one bright spot in Grete's existence—that the girl was growing to love him more warmly and fervently from day to day.

The situation of the Rumfort family was becoming steadily worse. Otto Demel paid a million and a half a month for his room, with breakfast and light, from which at least half a million had to be deducted for municipal taxes, the food for his breakfast, linen and electric light. A million a month is a very nice little sum for people who receive it as additional income, but for a family of five who have to live on it, it is practically nothing.

By degrees the position became so desperate that Grete, on whom all the rest depended, lost her head and grew desperate. Almost the whole of the rent Demel paid went every month on clothes and shoes for the two children; they owed the butcher and baker money, the calls of the gas and electric light collectors were recurrent disasters, and Grete had continually to go to Frau Greifer and beg humbly for a further small loan. Frau Greifer gave her the money; but she became more and more difficult, and her language ever plainer. The last time she had spoken out quite frankly:

"Fräulein Grete, that's the last time I shall give

you anything, and you'll have to think about paying me back soon. Do you know how much you owe me? I've got it all exactly noted down—ten millions! You needn't be frightened; that's a trifle, if you're willing to make it so. What you want is a rich friend who'll be ready to pay your debts. Don't be silly, or I'll get angry and see if I can't get my money in some other way. We won't set about it again as we did that time with Herr Löhner. I'll give you an opportunity of choosing a man for yourself. I'm giving an evening party next week, and all the smartest young ladies and the richest men are coming. I bet you you'll say to me yourself: 'Frau Greifer, I like that man, I'll go with him!' We're going to do *tableaux vivants*. The gentlemen like that, and the ladies have a chance of showing how beautiful they are. I'll dress you up as a nymph, and you'll see how the men'll be after you."

Grete choked with fear. She knew that Frau Greifer carried on an infamous business, and that such a visit to the woman might involve her in terrible danger. But she no longer had the strength to resist; her material anxiety was so everwhelming that she closed her eyes in a kind of stupefied resignation.

Throughout the days that followed she kept wondering what Otto Demel would say to it all. The man she loved filled her mind entirely; she herself,

and the consciousness that her honor was in danger, were placed entirely in the background. Now and then she asked herself whether she ought not to tell Demel everything. But no; she could not! He would be sure to offer her money—and she would rather take money from strangers than from the man she loved!

The day arrived; and Grete, who as a rule never left the house of an evening, told her mother a lie for the first time, saying she was going to see a school friend. At nine o'clock she went over to Frau Greifer's. The girls were already assembled there—all of them pretty young things, with brilliantly-rouged lips and cheeks, girls from a *milieu* which Grete knew only by hearsay. Grete went through the introduction by Fräulein Henriette, like one in a dream. Names such as Dolli, Putzi, Mäda, Alma and Lulu fell on her ears. Like one in a dream she allowed herself to be dressed in her costume. She looked so beautiful in it, that all the girls admired her.

Men arrived, old and young, slim and stout. As though in a trance Grete heard names mumbled; mechanically she drank champagne and liquors, nibbled rolls and pastry, went on to the daïs with another girl dressed as a shepherd, heard murmurs of applause, answered questions from men; but when hands were laid upon her she shook them off.

She became the witness of scenes that filled her with horror, and made her shut her eyes.

She refused to answer the impudent questions put to her by a coarse, fat man, and he left her with insulting words and a shrug of the shoulders. Another, who had been talking about her to Frau Greifer, sat down by her and introduced himself as Dr. Wurm. He was a thin, well-dressed, middle-aged man, with a hooked nose and prominent teeth suggestive of a beast of prey. He asked her point-blank what she was doing there.

"You're quite out of place here," he said. "You make the impression of being a respectable girl. How did you get into company like this?"

The kindly, human way in which he addressed her melted Grete's reserve. She clenched her teeth, dug her finger-nails into the palms of her hands to keep the tears back, and replied:

"How did I get here? Probably in the same way as all these girls; want, anxiety and money troubles leave us no choice!"

Dr. Wurm shook his head. He moved closer, took her hand, and, as though by accident, leaned against her.

"No, you mustn't compare yourself to the others! I know women well enough to see that you come of a good family and have been well brought up. The others come from nowhere; it is a promotion

for them to be received into Frau Greifer's circle. For you it is a descent. But I can quite imagine the situation. You are badly off, are out of work, and owe Frau Greifer money? Ten millions? Well, that isn't so bad. If you're nice to me, perhaps I'll pay your debts and do something more for you. Think it over—I'm looking for a friend just now, as it happens. Frau Greifer is giving another party like this in a few days, but a jollier one; it's going to be very lively. We'll meet here then, and we can go to one of the rooms."

Grete was about to jump up, but he held her back.

"No, no; we'll go to a room and talk it over pleasantly. And I'll bring the money you need. Today I can only give you a small advance, so to speak. Here's a million, perhaps that'll be enough for these few days."

Grete would have liked to tear herself away and fling the two banknotes in his face. But she no longer had the strength to do it. The word "millions" intoxicated her; she saw herself buying meat next day, and Else and Erich falling to with huge appetites; she saw her anxieties disappearing.

This man was willing to give Frau Greifer the ten millions and go on helping her after that! She would be able to deal with him; she would do

nothing that she could not justify to herself—and to Otto Demel.

Otto! A happy smile lit up her heated, terrified face, and she said quietly:

"I'll think it over, and now I'll go home."

Dr. Wurm was satisfied. His sure eye had not deceived him. This lovely girl was really innocent, and would make a fascinating mistress—for a few weeks; then she would belong to Frau Greifer again. The champagne would have its effect.

Grete slept a heavy, dreamless sleep till morning and woke with a headache, feeling more unhappy than she had ever felt in her life—so much so, that Otto Demel noticed her agitation. He questioned her sympathetically. Grete was deeply moved; she trembled from head to foot, and in another moment Demel would have learned everything. But the moment never came, for a telegraph boy with a telegram for Demel turned his thoughts in another direction.

The telegram announced that there was no longer any obstacle to the journalist's going to the Ruhr. Demel told Grete this and, pleased and excited, asked her to help him pack his suitcase. He would start that very day and would not be back for about ten days. He was so filled with professional enthusiasm that he did not see how pale Grete had turned.

Chapter 15—Liane Christens's Pearls

AN advertisement worded as follows had appeared in the most widely-read papers in Venice, Florence, Milan and Rome:

An extraordinary fine necklace, consisting of 220 large pearls of perfect shape and color, for private sale by foreign owner.—Reply "Discreet," Macchi Brothers' Advertising Agency, Milan.

This advertisement had been drawn up by Josef Horak. Frau Christens was acting in strict accordance with his plan of campaign. She had traveled straight to Milan and had handed the advertisement to the agency to be inserted in ten newspapers, the answers to be sent to the Hôtel Danieli in Venice, where she was going to stay.

She had now been a week in Venice, which, it being winter, was not so full of foreigners as at other times, saw all the sights at her leisure and awaited developments. The mission she had undertaken seemed to her a blessing, for she was sad

and lonely, and if her journey had had no object, her restlessness would have driven her on from one place to another.

Dr. Leid had sent her full details of what was being done in regard to her marriage. The letter she had left behind her, and the information Leid had given him, had been a severe blow to Christens; but at last he had seen that a respectable, peaceful separation was the best thing for both parties. He was, of course, ready to take all the blame on himself, so that there was no obstacle to a rapid termination of the proceedings; and, as both Christens and his wife were Protestants, the divorce would leave each of them free to remarry.

The matter-of-fact typed report was accompanied by a few lines written by the solicitor himself in a cordial and friendly tone. Frau Christens could not help smiling when she read the letter—a lonely man's letter to a lonely woman, the message of one lacerated heart to another. She wondered what life had yet in store for him and for herself.

The advertisements were most effective. Answers came from all over Italy, some from jewelers, others from private persons. But people who gave their names and addresses, and jewelers who wrote on their business notepaper, could hardly be professional receivers. The porter had just sent up another whole bundle of letters, and Frau Christens was

near losing courage as she flung one after another into the fire that flickered in the grate, for none of these offers and inquiries was of a suspicious nature.

The last of all, however, was worthy of close attention. It bore the postmark Genoa, and ran:

> "If it is really a bargain and the matter is confidential, we shall doubtless be able to come to an understanding. Please let me know by return of post where we can meet. Write by express letter to Giovanni Ambrosi, Poste Restante, Genoa."

This seemed at any rate to be a possible clue, and Frau Christens replied at once that she would travel to Genoa next day and put up at the Hôtel Britannia. Her correspondent was to ask for Frau Anna Müller.

But Frau Christens did not go to Genoa next day as she had said in her letter; instead, she went the same night and arrived at Genoa early next morning. She took a room at the Hôtel Britannia and began to alter her appearance. Red rouge, yellowish powder, black penciling, lipstick, scent, a conspicuous dress of glaring colors, which she had had specially made in Vienna—and the aristocratic, distinguished Frau Christens was transformed into an unmistakable *demi-mondaine.*

Frau Christens surveyed herself with delight in the large mirror. She was extremely satisfied with her new appearance. Then, with the help of soap and water and alcohol, she resumed her normal aspect. She concluded the day with a drive through lovely Genoa and a trip to Nervi. She went to bed early in order to be in possession of her full powers next day, both physical and intellectual.

The train from Venice arrived at Genoa at nine o'clock. The Hôtel Britannia is quite close to the station, so it was likely that Signor Giovanni Ambrosi would call about ten. And so he did. But when the porter came in search of her shortly aften ten, he announced that not *a* gentleman, but two gentlemen, had called.

A minute or two later they entered the room of Frau Ann Müller from Vienna—for as such had she registered. One was a little round fellow with a pug nose, jolly round eyes, a little round mouth and a prominent stomach. The other was a very lean man, bald-headed, with an uneasy flicker in his eyes.

"Which of you gentlemen is Signor Giovanni Ambrosi?" Frau Liane asked.

The fat man answered:

"Neither of us. We are his confidential agents and friends. Herr Ambrosi is not in Genoa at present. He is a great collector of precious stones,

and we are authorized to buy on his behalf. Herr Ambrosi saw your advertisement in the *Corriere della Sera* and is interested in the pearls. Will you show us the necklace?"

Frau Christens thrust her hand deep into the bosom of her dress and took out the pearl-necklace, wrapped in tissue paper. The tall man snatched at it and immediately examined it with a magnifying glass.

"You will understand, gentlemen, that I had to hide it on the journey. I couldn't let them find it on me at the frontier."

The two men nodded and exchanged glances. Then the tall one spoke.

"A beautiful necklace! May I ask if it is your own property?"

The rouged demi-mondaine smiled.

"It's my property now, and that's enough! If you'll give me a good price, I'll come to you pretty often. I expect before long to have a magnificent tiara of twelve five-carat diamonds. Perhaps my friend will bring the tiara from Venice. He was here three months ago and sold a lot of things. Possibly you yourselves were the buyers."

The eyes of both men twinkled mistrustfully. The fat man, who was stroking the pearls with his thick fingers, looked Frau Christens full in the face, while the tall man gazed sideways at her.

"But you must know to whom your friend sold the jewels. He must have told you. May I ask what your friend's name is?"

The so-called Frau Anna Müller crossed her legs in a challenging manner and blew out the smoke of her cigarette in true cocotte style. She knew that much depended on her answer.

"I don't know by what name my friend went here, and I don't know who bought the stuff from him. Circumstances arose which made it impossible, or at least inadvisable, for me to meet him after he came back from Italy. He sent me this pearl necklace by a messenger and asked me over the telephone to put an advertisement in the papers. He said that two buyers would probably answer who would be suitable—that is, who wouldn't ask many questions. But you don't seem to answer this description, gentlemen, for you are very inquisitive."

"We are not inquisitive; we don't want to know anything at all. These are fine pearls, and that's enough. But we must be careful; and we should like to know if it was your friend we did the big deal with three months ago. What is he like?"

Frau Christens triumphed in her heart. The two Italians had already confessed by degrees that they had done a big deal three months before.

"Well, he's a dark, good-looking man, very slight and always well-dressed, in Vienna, at any rate. For

that matter, I've got a little photograph of him on me."

With these words she opened a locket which she wore round her neck on a thin gold chain, and showed the two men a small but clear photograph of Egon Stirner. It was a photograph taken at Semmering by an agent of Josef Horak, when Egon Stirner was spending a week of feverish gayety with Regina Rosenow at the Hôtel Panhans. He had followed the two in the guise of an itinerant photographer and had taken first Regina and Egon together, then Egon alone, on the tennis court close to the Hôtel Erzherzog Johann.

The Italians looked long at the little photograph, which showed Egon's head only. They whispered together again, and at last the tall man said:

"We know this gentleman; we have done business with him. Now we shall be able to talk to each other freely."

Liane Christens drew a long breath. The game was going well for her. But now she must be very cautious.

"I must point out, gentlemen," she said, "that the pearls must be sold singly and on no account in Italy. They must go to America if possible. If they were sold here, there would always be a danger of their being recognized by their size and beauty. They are not so marvelously beautiful as those

you bought three months ago, but they're very choice all the same."

The fat man nodded:

"These pearls will go where the others are," he said. "You can rely on us; we're no greenhorns."

"And now name your price. I must get the money very soon, because I want to get back to Vienna as quickly as possible."

The pearls were again silently examined through the magnifying glass, counted and felt. The anonymous Italians began to make calculations—multiply and add on a piece of paper. The tall man finally announced the result.

"We are willing to pay you eighty thousand lire to-morrow. One moment, I know what you are going to say—they are worth three times the sum. Quite true. Falotti in Venice will give you a quarter of a million lire cash down for the pearls. Only you will have to prove your identity and show that the pearls are your legal property. We ask no questions, and wish to know nothing. We did not ask questions of your friend either, although in his case we should have had every reason for doing so. For that matter, we knew without asking. . . ."

Liane Christens pretended to be giving the matter profound consideration.

"I will telegraph your offer to my friend, so I shall have his answer to-morrow morning at latest.

Please come and see me some time to-morrow morning and then we will complete the business, if the answer should be 'yes.'"

The men went, and Frau Liane danced about in the room as delighted as a schoolgirl. It had gone splendidly, had exceeded her and the detective's wildest expectations! And now she must act shrewdly—shrewdly and cautiously!

Frau Christens left the hotel soon after the Italians and walked along the Via Balbi. Obedient to the Viennese detective's instructions, she suddenly stopped in the midst of the crowd, took a mirror from her vanity bag and pretended to arrange her hair. In reality the mirror, which was extremely large for toilet purposes, was meant to show whether anyone was following her. And she actually saw a young man, who was walking some five yards behind her, suddenly stop and pretend to look into a shop window.

In Genoa the taxi-cabs drive about the streets all day on the look-out for passengers. Frau Liane reflected rapidly. She had told the two receivers she would telegraph to Vienna, so she must do so. She beckoned to an empty cab, got in, and told the driver to go to the Galleria Mazzini, where the main post office is. During the drive the mirror came into action again. The young man had actually taken a cab, too; and was following her.

At the post office, Liane at once asked for a telegraph form. Her pursuer did the same. In a leisurely manner she filled in the form as follows:

"Karl Schulz, Poste Restante, Vienna. Can buy 80,000 metres. Wire back if too little.—ANNA."

The fellow looked unobtrusively over her shoulder while he too scribbled on a form. Frau Liane had intentionally used a great deal of ink, so that now, when she ran a sheet of blotting-paper over the handwriting, the imprint was plainly legible on the blotting-paper. Then she handed in the telegram, while the young man put the blotting-paper into his pocket and disappeared with it.

Liane knew that her telegram would come back in about a fortnight marked "undelivered," but it would have all the effect she wished. The two receivers would be informed of its contents by their spy, and would assume that it was a prearranged code, and that Frau Müller had really told her friend of the offer. They would, therefore, no longer have any suspicion at all of her.

She now wished to get into communication with the Genoa police. But she could not possibly do so directly, for the receivers' agent would doubtless continue to keep her under observation; so she must return to the hotel.

Fortunately she had obtained a room with a telephone. To dispense with the assistance of the porter, she had the telephone book brought to her room, looked out the number of the police headquarters, and rang up. She was quickly connected, and asked if she might speak personally to the Chief of Police about an urgent matter. After some difficulty she was allowed to do so, and said in Italian, slowly, in order that every word might be understood:

"Frau Liane Christens, from Vienna, speaking. I am staying at the Hôtel Britannia under the name of Anna Müller. Perhaps you will remember, sir, that the wife of the lawyer Dr. Leid was murdered in Vienna three months ago. The murderer disappeared without leaving a trace, taking with him her jewels, which were of immense value. . . . You remember the case, sir, and have paid special attention to it? I am glad to hear that. Well, Frau Leid's husband is a good friend of mine, and I have been hunting for the murderer with the knowledge and approval of the Vienna police. I believe that I have discovered the two receivers, who bought the pearls and other jewels from the murderer, here in Genoa. They will call on me at the hotel tomorrow morning. I cannot communicate directly with your officials, because I am being watched. How will it be possible for me to tell you every-

thing in detail and discuss what further steps to take . . . ?

"Aha! Very good! I am to be at Morpurgo's, the milliner's, in the Via Orefici, in an hour's time, and a police officer will play the part of a shop assistant. We will go into a trying-on cubicle, and I will tell him everything in full. . . ."

An hour later the painted and powdered lady was sauntering along the Via Orefici and looking into the shop windows through her lorgnette. Then she went into Morpurgo's, the big milliner's, where the police-officer was waiting for her. The young man, who was again on her heels, retired to a café opposite the milliner's.

Frau Liane hurriedly ordered a few things, and then the manager, who had been informed of what was happening, conducted her into his private room, where the head of the Genoese detective section, Signor Filippo Bellini, was waiting for her. As he had been a student in Vienna and spoke German perfectly, Frau Christens was able to use her mother-tongue again for the first time for days past. She told him as rapidly as possible how the Viennese detective, Josef Horak, had suspected the bank employee, Egon Stirner; how Stirner had gone to Italy immediately after the murder; how her own plan of campaign had been drawn up; and how it had been carried out in Genoa.

Signor Bellini held out his hand to her.

"You've done splendidly, my dear lady, better than any professional could have done. But now we've got to finish the matter off. Are you interested only in catching the murderer and not in getting back the stolen jewelry?"

"Yes, Signor Bellini. Frau Leid's husband is so sensitive a man, and has such delicate feelings, that in any case he would never touch the jewelry again, or even look at it."

"That makes the affair considerably easier, for if that is so, all we need is a confession by the receivers. Very well, then. To-morrow morning one of our women detectives will begin work at the Hôtel Britannia as a chambermaid, and will be hidden in the wardrobe in your room while you are negotiating with the receivers. You will actually give the men the pearl necklace; will take eighty thousand lire for it; and as soon as the two men have left your room, the detective will jump out of the wardrobe, run to the window, give a signal, and the receivers will be arrested by policemen waiting below."

"And my necklace?" asked Frau Liane, a little frightened.

"You will get that back at once at police headquarters; you will follow the prisoners there. But you will hand over the eighty thousand lire to us. The police would like to make a little bit out of the business."

Frau Christens left the milliner's heavily laden with parcels, and returned to the hotel. Her pursuer hurried after the cab on foot; the business was visibly getting on his nerves. The amateur detective spent the evening at the Teatro Carlo Felice, where one of Verdi's operas was indifferently performed. She had a disturbed night; but when a pretty little chambermaid came into her room next morning and, without saying a word, took up her position close to the big wardrobe, ready to disappear into it at a moment's notice, she was straightway ready for action.

At half-past ten the two men of the day before were announced. The girl then concealed herself in the wardrobe.

Frau Liane received her visitors with the information that she had had a telegram an hour before, instructing her to accept eighty thousand lire. She handed over the pearl necklace, which the lean man examined yet again, and took the notes.

"There is something else I wanted to say, gentlemen," Frau Christens added, inviting the two men to sit down. "As you know—we had better be perfectly frank with one another—among the jewelry my friend sold you three months ago was a bracelet with a magnificent ten-carat emerald in it."

The fat man nodded hesitatingly, as though it were painful to him to be reminded of it.

"Well this emerald is an heirloom in Dr. Leid's

family. Dr. Leid has got over his wife's death, and also the loss of the pearl necklace and the rest of the jewelry; but he cannot bear to lose the emerald. We have found out that he is willing to pay twice as much as the emerald is worth to get it back. Family tradition and superstition have something to do with it, of course. Do you think it possible to give him an opportunity of buying the emerald back, from Paris or London, or wherever else it may be?"

The tall man raised his hands imploringly.

"Out of the question! It would be playing with fire. Besides, the emerald, which certainly is unique, has been in America for a long time, probably in the hands of a rich man who would not hand it over for any price."

"Very well, then we'll let it be. I hope we shall do a lot more business, gentlemen."

"We shall be glad to. We fetch letters addressed to Giovanni Ambrosi from the post office every day."

They took their leave and departed. The girl sprang out of the wardrobe, flew to the window and vigorously shook out a red cloth. The rest went with lightning rapidity. The two men came out of the hotel; four policemen in plain clothes leaped upon them, handcuffed them, pushed them into a waiting motor-car and dashed off to the police headquarters. Frau Liane followed immediately.

The men were examined in the presence of the

Chief of Police, the head of the detective section, the woman detective who had played the part of chambermaid, and Liane Christens. Signor Bellini removed the handcuffs from the two sinners and greeted them most cordially.

"Well, Signori Pietro Fosci and Ludo Barga, we've caught you red-handed at last. We've known you two highly-respectable gentlemen for a long time. Whenever there has been a suspicious deal in jewels you've been mixed up in it, but it was confoundedly hard to stop your game. Now we've succeeded, thanks to this German Signora's cleverness."

Both men cast furious glances at Frau Christens, who had just had her pearl necklace handed back to her. Signor Bellini continued:

"You needn't look so miserable; you're going to get off lightly, and the eighty thousand lire the Signora is handing over to us is only a tiny fraction of the money you made three months ago over the other big deal. This is how things are: what we all want is not the jewelry which the poor lady's murderer sold you, but the murderer himself. If you will do everything you possibly can to help us convict him, we won't do anything to you this time. But if you play us any tricks, straight to the cells you go, and you'll certainly get a year or two apiece."

The men burst out into frantic lamentations and torrents of chatter, accompanied by vehement gesticulations, and the scene ended in the two re-

ceivers, who saw that nothing was really to be done to them, signing the following statement:

"Three months ago a business friend, a dealer in antiquities, introduced us to a gentleman from Vienna. The gentleman from Vienna, who spoke our language admirably, had asked the dealer in antiquities, quite at random, if he could sell a quantity of jewelry quite privately, and our friend put him into touch with us. He stayed at the Hôtel Miramere and called himself Erwin Reiner. We recognize him in the little photograph which Signora Müller showed us. Signor Reiner sold us a large and very valuable pearl necklace, a bracelet with a large emerald in it, other bracelets, pins, brooches, and diamond and ruby rings, for a million lire in all. We sold the pearls and jewels in Paris, partly set, partly as single stones, and they were re-sold there to Americans and Englishmen. We are ready, if our traveling expenses are paid and we are given something for our trouble, to go to Vienna with Frau Müller and identify the man who sold us the jewelry in the presence of the authorities."

The same evening, Liane Christens traveled to Vienna by express train, accompanied by Signori Fosci and Barga. The three were the best of friends, and the stout Signor Barga, in particular, regaled the company with varied anecdotes of his career as a receiver.

Chapter 16—A Disappointment and Its Consequences

THESE were the bitterest days of Grete Rumfort's young life. In accordance with the law which decrees that misfortunes never come singly, blow after blow fell upon her. Things happened which well-nigh destroyed her remaining vitality, which beat her down as a hailstorm crushes the growing corn.

Not till the day after Frau Greifer's party—at which she had been dressed as a nymph and had made Dr. Wurm's acquaintance—did she realize fully what had happened. She had displayed her body to the covetous gaze of immoral men and tacitly consented to become the mistress of one of them. When she thought the matter over quietly, she was obliged to confess to herself that this man Wurm, who seemed to her in retrospect unspeakably repulsive, already had a claim on her. She had taken money from him, a lot of money, a million crowns, and she knew quite well that it was only a payment on account, a mortgage on herself.

The sight of the two banknotes horrified her. She dared not touch them; she was determined to give them back next time she saw Wurm, and only to stay a minute at the procuress's house in order to do this. After that—well, there were still a few things in the house that could be sold, and then Otto Demel would come back, and she could ask him, kind, good-hearted fellow, for an advance.

Man proposes, trivial happenings dispose. While Grete, absorbed in her thoughts, was tidying the journalist's room, she happened to slip up and break both panes of one of the windows with the broom-handle. She stood and looked at the broken pieces and splinters, horrified beyond words. It was winter; the snowflakes would find their way in at once through the empty window-frames; the panes must be replaced that very day, for she did not know when Demel would return. The glazier came, inspected the damage, took measurements and, having consulted his price list, declared that the two large panes would cost four hundred thousand crowns.

Erich came home from school with bright eyes and a high color; he cried and complained of headache and a sore throat. The doctor had to be sent for; he found the boy's throat badly inflamed and ordered all sorts of expensive medicines. Erich was feverish, and talked of his feet being wet and snow getting into his boots.

Grete pursued the tactics of the ostrich as long as possible in regard to her own footwear and that of her brother and sister; but she now examined her brother's boots and found that the soles were absolutely worn through.

She made a rough calculation, and ascertained that Dr. Wurm's million would be just enough to pay for window-panes, doctor, medicine and cobbler.

She felt as though a cruel, malignant fate were pointing out the road to ruin as the only practicable one. . . .

But worse was to come. In the past few weeks a change had taken place in her sister Else. She had suddenly begun to see a good deal of (she told them) a rich school friend, and to spend her afternoons and evenings at this girl's home. The rich friend seemed to have very generous parents, for they gave Else all kinds of pretty things—a new vanity bag, silk stockings, even a quite new winter dress and a hat to wear with it.

The whole thing seemed to Grete improbable and suspicious, but she was weighted to such a degree with her own anxieties, so oppressed by tormenting thoughts, that she shut her eyes to it. One evening, however, just before the main door was shut, the thirteen-year old girl came home absolutely intoxicated. Grete was frightened to death.

She put Else to bed quickly without their mother—who had been unwell of late—noticing anything. She found in Else's vanity bag a bottle of expensive French scent and several hundred thousand crowns.

In her despair Grete began to weep, so violently and convulsively that the child awoke from her half-slumber, became sobered and, with heart-rending sobs, made a confession to Grete.

A few weeks before, as she was coming home from school, an old man of very distinguished appearance had driven past her in a car and given her a friendly glance. She had smiled back at him, and he had told the chauffeur to stop, got out of the car and talked to her in a fatherly way. Then he had invited her to go with him to a confectioner's not far off, and there she had learned that he, too, lived in the Melchiorgasse, in the modern feudal palace bearing the number 4, and had known her by sight for a long time. He had promised to give her money and all kinds of nice things if she would come to see him sometimes; for he was, he said, very lonely. After some hesitancy, she had done so, and this was the result.

Sobbing convulsively, trembling with shame and regret, Else whispered her confession into her sister's ear—the confession of a poor little half-starved girl, yearning for whipped cream and silk stockings,

greedy and pleasure-loving, but not a bit worse than other little girls. The worst had not happened, indeed; but what had happened was bad enough, and might have had a profoundly demoralizing effect on an immature, sensitive child.

Grete, in tears, kissed and caressed her little sister and made her swear never to cross the old scoundrel's threshold again. Then she said in a cold, hard voice:

"You won't want for anything more, Else! You'll get all you need from me!"

Grete lay awake till morning. She determined to make a last effort. She would wait till Otto Demel returned to Vienna, tell him openly and frankly in how desperate a plight she and her family were, and beg him for counsel and help. He was a journalist of position and prestige, with many and varied connections. Surely he would be able to get her a tolerably well-paid post and perhaps make her a large enough loan to enable her to buy her freedom from Frau Greifer and give Dr. Wurm back his million.

Early in the morning Grete fell asleep, whispering the name Otto and believing in miracles with all the optimism of seventeen.

Next morning Otto Demel actually returned. He was full of interesting impressions and experiences. He greeted her hastily, had a bath, quickly un-

packed his suit-case, flung drawers open, changed his clothes and hurried off to his office to send his first article to press.

Grete tidied Otto's room. Her cheeks burned with joy at his return, and her heart beat rapidly as she thought of her coming interview with him.

The middle drawer of the writing-table was wide open, and was so full of letters and papers that Grete could not shut it immediately. As she was trying to press the papers down, her eye fell on an unfolded letter addressed "My darling Otto!"

Feminine curiosity was too strong for instinctive delicacy. She read the passionate love-letter, then another from another woman; she burrowed into the whole of a man's past—and he a man who had drunk deeply of life, had loved and been loved by women without number. New names continually met her eye—the names of girls, married women, actresses, passionate maidens and mature Jezebels.

Grete tottered. She felt a cold hand gripping at her heart. So he, too, was nothing but a rake, a woman-hunter, a seducer of girls! He, too, was a man in whom she could not put her trust, for if she did he would snatch at her as Löhner had done, and Wurm, and all the others she had met.

She awoke rudely from her first tender maiden dream; life stared her in the face, naked and

brutal. She had aged by years in a quarter of an hour.

She thought now that she knew life thoroughly, and in reality she knew less of it than ever. For at seventeen she did not and could not know how many-sided a man's character is, how he can remain good and clean even if he has held a hundred women in his arms. She was unconscious of the great, fundamental difference between man and woman—between man, who regains his self-respect after every satisfaction of the senses, and woman, whose blood and heart alike are forever tainted once she has known a man's passion.

Grete's figure stiffened, and her mouth twisted in a contemptuous smile. Very good! She would go to Frau Greifer's next party and take money from anyone who would give it to her.

Chapter 17—After the Ball

THERE was a fancy-dress ball at the Concert House. The watchword was "Germany in Distress," and despite the fantastic price of the tickets all the rich people in Vienna had been mobilized to help their starving, freezing, despairing ally—by dancing.

A fraction of the sum this carnival cost the participators in tickets, cars, costumes, champagne, flowers and suppers, would have sufficed to keep a hundred thousand of the poor of Berlin for a month, but human beings are so constructed that they prefer spending a million on a charity ball to giving a hundred thousand crowns direct.

Herr and Frau Rosenow were sitting in their box; and Herr Rosenow was expressing his disapproval of Regina's conduct in dancing the whole evening with his private secretary, Egon Stirner.

"I don't understand Regi at all," he complained. "Men of first-rate family, and with heaps of money, are delighted when she speaks to them, and she'll

have nothing to do with anyone but Stirner! He's a very able, clever fellow, who may do well in life, but he's not a good match. Of course, it'd suit the beggar to get our Regi! Since he let himself in over Krieglach Timber, he's been as stony-broke as ever, and he's continually coming and asking for advances on his salary."

"Jonas," Frau Rosenow said, reproachfully, "don't you put on airs! When you married me at Bielitz you were nothing but a beggar yourself; don't you remember, you hadn't even a tail-coat on! And today you're a rich man, so rich that Regi can marry whom she likes. I like Egon Stirner very much, and if our child loves him, I won't let you break her heart!"

Frau Rosenow uttered the last words in so loud a voice that her husband hastened to pacify her. "Things are so different nowadays! For that matter, we don't know anything definite yet, and Regi is such a sensible girl, thank heaven, that she'll do the right thing without our telling her."

Three of the five persons in the next box, where the Rosenow's conversation had been partly audible, whispered to one another. In the box were Frau Christens, Otto Demel, the detective Horak, the two Italian jewel dealers, Pietro Fosci and Ludo Barga. Horak had brought the two men to the fancy-dress ball because it seemed to him to

afford the best opportunity of identifying Egon Stirner as the man Erwin Reiner, who had sold Frau Lia Leid's jewels in Genoa.

While the occupants of the one box were discussing Regina, and those of the next box, Stirner, the two danced on amid the medley of gayly-colored dresses. The "Tango Milonga" came to an end, and Egon escorted his partner to the champagne buffet, where he had had a small table reserved for them.

"Regina," Stirner began, "have you still not got the courage to tell your people you care for me?"

"Courage? That doesn't need much courage, my dear Egon! But you know it's not easy for me to give up my freedom and independence; and that I will only tie myself to a man if I feel that it must be done, because I can't do without him."

"And don't you know that, even now, after that mad, marvelous week at Semmering? Weren't you perfectly happy there, in my arms? Didn't you feel that we belonged to one another——?"

Regina blushed a little.

"Yes, Egon; I don't deny it. But why are you so impatient? Can't we belong to one another in Vienna, too, without being formally married? Is not the secrecy of our relationship in itself delightful, and does it not make every meeting more wonder-

ful to feel that it must soon be over, and that no one must know of it?"

Stirner pressed Regina's hand so hard that she gave a little cry.

"No, Regina! I suffer hideous torments in my hours of loneliness, in the nights I have to spend without you. I yearn for you so much that I can't sleep, so that all my nerves are on edge. You're afraid of losing your freedom? How many more times must I tell you that as my wife you will have all the freedom you want? I say this in the firm conviction that you will never want to leave me for another. And if this should happen—well, I'm not the man to force a woman to belong to him against her will.

"And there's something more, Regina. Quite honestly, openly, and frankly—I don't want to be your father's private secretary any longer. I want to show what I can do when I have plenty of capital at my disposal. It's not you only I want, but your money, your billions, to help me climb to the top over the heads of all these dirty little sharpers and swindlers. You don't know the repressed strength and willpower there is in me, Regina!"

Regina looked at him enthusiastically. A gentle tremor ran through her slim body. She drew a long breath and said:

"I never can resist your frankness. Come on,

Egon, we'll go to the box. I wonder what sort of face papa'll make when I introduce myself as Herr Stirner's blushing *fiancée!*"

Frau Christens leaned back anxiously towards Josef Horak.

"Don't you think it ought to be done now? I don't much care for the Rosenows, but I've no reason to hurt their feelings so fearfully as they must be hurt if their daughter were formally engaged to Stirner before his arrest. Just picture what a scandal it would be! And I have a feeling that something of the kind is going to happen to-day!"

Demel agreed with her, and Horak said hesitatingly:

"Very well; we can go down with our guests at once and hunt for Stirner. As soon as they have identified him, I'll call him aside and arrest him."

But this solution proved impracticable. At that very moment the couple entered the box. Regina bent down to her father and mother, kissed each on the forehead and said, so loud that the people in the neighboring boxes could hear distinctly:

"Dear father and mother, Egon and I are engaged."

Tears came into Mamma Rosenow's eyes, and she was on the point of making a theatrical scene, when Papa Rosenow jumped up and exclaimed, very red in the face:

"I forbid it! Have I given my consent? It's a bit thick, Herr Stirner: in fact, it's a—a piece of impudence!"

Egon stood pale and speechless, while Regina smiled scornfully. But Mamma Rosenow could no longer keep her countenance or her dignity. She relapsed into the good old Bielitz traditions of her youth, and began to sob.

"Jonas, I told you I wouldn't let you ill-treat my child! If she loves him, let her have him, and we ought to thank God for it!"

Regina saw that the attention of the people in the two neighboring boxes was being attracted, and rapidly brought the scene to an end. She stroked her agitated father's forehead and said in so low a voice that only he, his wife and Egon could hear:

"Don't get excited, papa dear; it's no use. I became Egon's wife a long time ago, when I was at Semmering, though there wasn't any formal arrangement between us. So if you want to avoid a scandal, you must reconcile yourself to the business. We two, at any rate, are perfectly happy."

Generaldirektor Rosenow proved, as he had so often done at shareholders' meetings, that he was equal to every situation. For a moment he was so astounded and horrified that he could not speak; then he stood up, clapped Stirner vigorously on the shoulder with his right hand, and said:

"Well, my dear son, I always thought you were a rogue! And now let's have some champagne and drink the engaged couple's health. Stop bubbling, old woman, your face is all the colors of the rainbow."

Horak, Demel, and Frau Christens, who had heard what he said, consulted rapidly. Fosci and Barga nodded vigorously and assured them in Italian that the slightly-built man in dress clothes was identical with the Erwin Reiner they knew. Horak jumped up and was for arresting Egon Stirner at once to prevent things from coming to a head, but he was too late. A married couple, friends of the Rosenows, had entered the box, heard the news of the engagement, congratulated the couple hurriedly and gone down into the ballroom to spread the news. A few minutes later a reporter of the *Morning Trumpet* was able to telephone, just in time for insertion in the paper, the news that Fräulein Regina Rosenow, only daughter of the billionaire chairman of the Central European Bank, Jonas Rosenow, and one of the greatest beauties in Vienna, had become engaged to her father's private secretary, Herr Egon Stirner, at the fancy-dress ball in aid of "Germany in Distress."

After a moment's reflection Horak altered his plan. A scandal in the ballroom must certainly be avoided, and Stirner could be arrested later.

At four o'clock in the morning Horak, accompanied by two junior detectives, drove in a taxicab behind the motor-car which was taking the Rosenows home to their mansion in the Pötzleinsdorfer Allee. Egon Stirner was with the Rosenows, but got out at the Schottentor to go to his bachelor flat in the Florianigasse.

He was gazing contemplatively after his future father-in-law's car, when three men came up to him. One of them, whom he knew as the country gentleman Hort, took him by the arm and said in a loud voice, which had a weirdly hollow, uncanny ring in the bleak morning air:

"Herr Egon Stirner, I arrest you on grave suspicion of having murdered Frau Lia Leid."

Chapter 18—Raided

NOT for many years had the people of Vienna experienced so long and severe a winter. At Easter it was still freezing at night, the trees and bushes were naked, and there was not a breath of spring in the air. Then one day a hurricane came roaring up from the south; warm floods poured down from the sky and buried the winter under masses of mud and dirt.

Late one evening the journalist Otto Demel—in low spirits and oppressed by a variety of tormenting thoughts—was sauntering across the Inner City to end a very busy day among colleagues and friends at the Café Landtmann, close to the Burg Theater. But he found no one there whom he knew; so he sat alone, drank, from force of habit, one cup of Turkish coffee after another, lit a succession of cigarettes and reviewed the happenings of the past six months.

In a few days the great trial would begin—Egon Stirner's trial for murder. Demel's thoughts went

back to the night of the ball in February, on which Stirner had been arrested. The news had not become known until the next day's evening papers appeared, and the sensation it created thrust all other events into the background.

Stirner had denied his guilt when arrested, during his examination by the police, and before the magistrate. He declared again and again that he was entirely innocent of having caused Frau Lia Leid's death; he only admitted having stolen her jewelry at the place of assignation in the Melchiorgasse. He had, he said, left Frau Leid in the darkened room, taken her jewelry without her noticing it, and gone off. He knew nothing of what had happened afterwards.

Nobody believed his version of the story; even his defending counsel, Dr. Valentin, advised him to drop it and make a full confession. But Stirner adhered stubbornly to his statement. He declared over and over again, with unshakable composure, that he had not committed murder.

Regina Rosenow behaved in a manner which more than surprised those who knew her well. Demel had known her for some years, and he had assumed that Regina would regard her *fiancée's* arrest simply as a personal insult and humiliation; that her fondness for him would be transformed into hate, and that

she would go abroad for a long time to escape all malicious expressions of sympathy.

But he was wrong. Regina, indeed, almost collapsed under the blow. The frivolous, hyper-modern girl, denounced as a heartless flirt, withdrew completely from the world; and when she received Demel a few weeks later, he saw a pale young woman, petrified with sorrow, who seemed to him spiritually matured and ennobled. Demel had always had the gift of inspiring complete confidence in women, and she poured out her heart to him.

"I never knew till this happened how much I loved Egon—and still love him! I know what you're thinking: a man who has murdered his mistress for the sake of her jewelry is a brute in human shape, a wild beast who deserves no sympathy. But he denies having committed the murder. And then, who can know what passed through his mind? Who can follow the mysterious impulses of a human brain? He loved me, that I know, and I loved him. I know that to-day more certainly than in the days when he was allowed to kiss me.

"Papa and mamma are very anxious that I shall go to Paris or London for a few weeks, till the trial is over. But I can't make up my mind to do it. Just imagine my position. There isn't a single human being in Vienna who stands by Egon; not one who doesn't condemn him in advance, not one who has

shown him the least kindness while he has been in prison! And shall I run away from him, too? No; even if I may not go to see him—and I can't inflict that upon my parents—he knows that I am thinking of him, that I am here. . . ."

Regina Rosenow began to sob. Demel was deeply moved, but he could not help smiling quietly and saying to himself that women were all alike when they were in love. The over-civilized modern girl, who cynically rejected all conventional ideas of morality, the little seamstress, the cocotte and the respectable married woman—the differences between them were only superficial, and love leveled them all.

Now, sitting alone in the *café,* Demel's thoughts recurred to the scene at the Villa Rosenow; then they flew to another girl.

Grete Rumfort! How strangely the charming pretty child had altered in the few months he had known her! He bit his lip; uneasy thoughts tormented him.

It had begun about two months ago. Grete had become cold and stand-offish towards him, almost rude. It had begun just when the Rumforts' material position changed surprisingly for the better, and Grete became a young lady of fashion. A servant was engaged; when he came home of an afternoon he smelt roast meat and butter instead of

cabbage and turnip-tops; little Erich wore a new, warm winter coat, and Else had one, too, with a little fur collar, if you please; and Grete was perfectly dressed, like a young lady in well-to-do society. The change had been so striking that Otto Demel had not been able to help questioning Erich when he met him one day in the street. The boy told him that Grete had been engaged as companion by a very rich old lady who gave her quantities of money and presents.

Several times since then Demel had met Grete at the house door at one, two or three in the morning, also returning home. And he had always felt that Grete was frightened and embarrassed; she had always been in a perfect fever of haste to get away from him.

Demel laughed aloud to himself, to the evident surprise of some of the other guests.

"So my German Gretchen has found a rich lover," he thought; "she has sold herself to the highest bidder, as all the rest do! Fool that I was not to seize the many opportunities I had! There is nothing more exasperating than looking back on lost opportunities; and a man who worries himself with moral scruples is always a fool!"

Demel spoke thus to himself; but in his subconscious mind, he still saw Grete's charming little face, the large, clear, pure eyes which had regarded

him when he told her stories of the world beyond her ken, of his profession, and people she did not not know. He grew hot all over and clenched his teeth. He asked himself if what he felt was not simply jealousy, raging jealousy.

A man he knew came into the *café* and spoke to him. He was Dr. Kellner, an official of the Vienna morality police. Demel asked him to sit down at his table, but the official refused.

"I must go in a minute. I've a rather important piece of business on hand which is to be carried through to-night."

"Another raid?"

"Yes; and one which will cause a big sensation. You can come, too, if it would amuse you. It will be very interesting. It's at 56 Melchiorgasse. We're clearing out an awful den there."

Demel was astonished.

"At 56 Melchiorgasse! Why, it's next door to my place! Of course I'll come, too. I've wanted for a long time to see one of these raids."

In the taxicab Dr. Kellner explained the situation.

"We have known for a long time," he said, "that a woman called Frau Greifer, who pretends to run a big dressmaker's shop, has been arranging meetings of men and young women by night. We've winked at it so far, because the men who go there

are all men of high social position, and we wanted to avoid a scandal. But of late the procuress has been going too far. She has been enticing quite young girls—some of them of good family—to her place, shamelessly exploiting them, and turning the parties into regular orgies.

"Well, here we are. Do you see those men—there, and there? They're my men. I've got an introduction from a Count Türk, who used to come here regularly till a short time ago, so we shall get in all right without any trouble."

The official and Demel entered the little blind alley which runs along the side of No. 56, and knocked four times on the locked doors of the so-called registry office. The door was opened a fraction of an inch. He pushed Count Türk's card, bearing a few words of recommendation, through the chink. Then the door was flung open and Fräulein Henriette let the two men in, scrutinizing them sharply.

They took off their coats in the anteroom, paying a cloak-room fee of two hundred thousand crowns each. Then the tall and dignified lady who performed the duties of hostess, while Frau Greifer was busy in the kitchen with champagne bottles and liqueurs, conducted them into the big drawing-room.

They entered an atmosphere of smoke, noisy talk-

ing, shrill laughter, and piano-playing. There were men in lounge suits, dinner jackets, and full evening dress. About ten or twelve girls in very low evening dress sat by the men or on their knees, danced, drank champagne, laughed and sang.

Suddenly the room was darkened. Only one electric light illuminated the daïs in the bay-window. A long screen formed a kind of corridor from the door of a neighboring room to the daïs, so that the figures that mounted the daïs could not be seen till they were there.

A drunken man's voice called: "Look out, now we're going to see something nice!"

Two young, very pretty girls appeared on the daïs enveloped only in silken draperies, which they slowly let fall. The scene that followed was accompanied by clapping, yells, laughter, heavy breathing, and groans.

The lights were turned on again. Demel shook himself and said to the police official:

"I've nothing against it personally, if grown-up people enjoy filth of this kind, but it's really disgusting. B-r-r-r!"

The events of the next few minutes took place with lightning rapidity, the breathless speed of a film unwound too quickly. It was all so sudden and abrupt that Demel had difficulty afterwards in reconstructing the scene.

From one of the adjoining rooms a woman's clear voice resounded, and men's voices were heard, loud and blustering. A chair was knocked over; the door flew open, and two drunken men dragged a girl into the room. She wore a green dress which left her shoulders and arms bare. The girl endeavored vainly to free herself from the men's brutal grasp; she sobbed and screamed to them to let her go.

A man's voice bawled:

"Up on the daïs with her. We don't make any exceptions here; they're all fair game here!"

One of the girls in the room sprang up from the man's lap where she was sitting, clapped her hands and cried:

"Quite right; make her show herself, the silly thing! I expect she's all skin and bone, and that's why she won't undress!"

Bellows of laughter and a storm of applause greeted her words, and the girl shrieked aloud as they began to tear off her dress.

In the midst of the tumult Dr. Kellner had disappeared. But Otto Demel stood with eyes wide open. He stared at the distressed, tortured girl as if he had seen a ghost. His spine stiffened with unspeakable horror. Then, with a yell of rage, he leapt into the crowd and roared at the top of his voice:

"Let her go, or I'll brain the lot of you!"

In a moment he had clasped Grete and dragged her away. She lay in his arms half-fainting.

At that moment a panic broke out. Five men, headed by Dr. Kellner, forced their way into the room with revolvers in their raised hands.

"Hands up!" Dr. Kellner shouted. "No one is to leave the room! In the name of the law!"

Everyone became sober at once. The men stood there pale and embarrassed, while the girls shrieked hysterically. One went into a convulsion of weeping, one rolled on the floor, another, quick as lightning, seized a knife which lay on the table and would have stabbed herself in the breast if one of the detectives had not prevented her.

Frau Greifer was dragged into the room between two policemen, hitting out like a mad-woman. Only Fräulein Henriette stood majestically with a scornful smile on her lips, as though the whole affair was no concern of hers.

The police officials did their business rapidly. The men had to declare their identity; the girls, Frau Greifer, Fräulein Henriette, and the staff were led away one by one and packed into the police van, which had driven up in the meantime.

Grete was still weeping quietly, and Demel still had his arm about her, when an official came up to him and said roughly:

"This girl must come, too!"

Demel pushed him away with his disengaged arm.

"You won't touch this girl! She is under my protection, and I'll go bail for her."

"That's a lot of use," the official said contemptuously. "There's no bail here; she must come to the station first, then we can see about it."

Dr. Kellner came up. He was surprised when he saw that Demel was unwilling to release the girl. He intervened and made his subordinate a sign to withdraw. He reflected that the powers that be would be far from pleased if offense were given to a journalist so highly respected, and moreover so feared on account of his sharp pen, as Demel was.

Demel, without saying a word, led the tottering girl to the cloak-room, took his hat and coat, and asked in a rough, hoarse voice, where Grete's things were. She whispered, with a terrified shudder:

"In there, in one of the rooms. But nothing would induce me to go back."

Demel said nothing, but put his overcoat over her bare shoulders. They went out into the street past two policemen. Demel opened the door of No. 58, and they entered the flat where both lived, without exchanging a word.

In the hall, Demel nodded curtly to Grete and was about to go into his room; but Grete followed him, and stood still on the threshold with clasped

hands, and whispered, her pale, childish face bathed in tears:

"Herr Demel, I must speak to you. I swear——"

Demel waved her away.

"Don't swear anything, or say anything, Fräulein Grete! I shouldn't believe a word you said. My own experience is quite enough for me."

"No; you don't know—please listen to me."

"Let's drop it; there's no point in it—I don't want to know anything."

Grete hung her fair head and was about to leave the room when Demel called her back.

"I should just like to say a few words to you. I hope that through my influence I shall be able to prevent your being charged or even called as a witness, so that you shall not be dragged into the scandal. Now you are rid of that bad woman who seems to have got you into her clutches. And you need not worry about the immediate future. Stay quietly at home for a few weeks and get well again; and then I'll try to find you a living. In the meantime I'll give you some money which ought to be enough for some little time to come. You needn't be afraid to take it from me; I don't ask for anything in return."

The last words were uttered in a tone of bitter contempt. Every drop of blood had vanished from Grete's face; she said not a word, but stared at him

round-eyed. She took the notes he thrust into her hand, and stole quietly from the room.

Demel was alone. He gave a deep sigh, and buried his face in his hands. His mind was a chaos of conflicting sensations—agonizing pain, which he could not, would not, explain to himself, the consciousness of having committed a shocking act of brutality, compassion for a beautiful creature, disgust at his own weakness, hatred of himself and of all mankind.

Chapter 19—A Failing Light

AFTER her short-lived prosperity and her swift collapse Marie Lechner had found her way back to the joyless alley. She still lived, ill and miserable, with her mother the washerwoman, and her father inebriate ex-soldier.

She really could not be said to live. She vegetated like a sickly plant, deprived of light and air, and was dying slowly but surely. In the daytime she was all alone in the dingy, poverty-stricken rooms. She sat hunched up on a chair by the window, silent and unoccupied, her thin, wasted shoulders wrapped in a dirty ragged blanket, and stared down into the dark, squalid yard, where scraps of carpet were beaten all the morning, or up to the tiny fragment of sky which was visible high above the roofs and seemed to be always gray.

From time to time, at intervals which became shorter and shorter, a terrible cough shook her girlish frame, and after each fit of coughing a thin stream of blood trickled through her bluish lips on

to the blanket, which she pulled closer and closer round her.

In the evening, when her mother came home from work, quite exhausted, Marie drank a mug of coffee or soup and was induced to eat a roll. Then she lay down on her straw mattress and slept a heavy, unrefreshing sleep. Sometimes she gave a piercing shriek in her sleep, or uttered disconnected but continually recurring words, which filled her mother with fear and horror.

The older woman and the girl seldom spoke to one another; but their eyes met continually, and they were eloquent of misery. Each suffered in her own way—the elderly, gouty, working woman, and the young courtesan, dying in squalor after a brief career of passion.

Marie hardly ever saw her father at all. The drunken cripple stood strangely in awe of his daughter. When he came home at night he slunk into his corner without a word, and he went off in the morning without a word on his round of the gin-palaces.

Marie very rarely left the house now; and when she did go out it was not till late in the evening. Then she hurried through side-streets till she reached Gumpendorferstrasse. She crawled upstairs, coughing and spitting blood, and begged a comrade of her recent past with hands raised in entreaty, to give

her what she yearned for. At last the girl would give way and, grumbling at her and abusing her, would fill the little bottle she had brought with a thick, colorless liquid. When Marie went away, she stopped on the next landing, looked timidly round, lifted her skirt, exposing her wretchedly thin leg, and drove into her flesh the point of a little syringe she had just filled.

The hours when the morphia raged in her veins and dominated her nerves were the only bright spot in her existence. . . .

The weeks came and went. Marie never read a newspaper; she did not know what was happening in the world, in the city, or even in the Melchiorgasse. The red spots on her sharp cheekbones became redder and redder; she always had a temperature; every fit of coughing was followed by a hemorrhage, and the rattling of her diseased lungs was ghastly to hear at night. Her mother, when she sat up in bed and listened fearfully to the sounds that came from Marie's straw mattress, compared the rattling of her lungs to the noise of a scythe being sharpened. More than once every night the old woman sank down on her bed, weeping, clasped her hands and implored her Creator, of His mercy to take her poor child to Himself.

Frau Lechner never asked her daughter what had happened and how she had suffered before she re-

turned mortally wounded to the Melchiorgasse. The unspeakable remained unspoken.

One evening, however, when the first warm spring breezes had begun to quicken men's blood, and the dry earth was greedily sucking up the warm raindrops, Marie smiled strangely at her mother, who had just come home, and said, in a voice which had an unearthly ring in it:

"Mother, it's stupid, I know, but I want to ask you something—will you fetch a clergyman to confess me? It's all over, mother; I can feel it coming, and I wouldn't like to be buried like a dog."

The washerwoman ran down the four flights of stairs to execute her daughter's wish, howling like a tortured animal. She went to one church after another and finally returned with a young priest. She waited out in the passage for a full hour, till the priest came out again.

The priest was a ruddy-faced young man, and his manner when he came had been almost gay; but when he left, his tears were running down over ashen cheeks. Once alone on the gloomy staircase, he crossed himself, folded his delicate white hands, and exclaimed through his sobs: "Our Father, which art in Heaven, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

When Frau Lechner went in she found Marie cheerful, and with a new light in her eyes. She spent

half the night washing her poor body and mending and patching the only dress she had brought back to the Melchiorgasse, till it looked almost smart again.

When her mother left in the morning to wash for other people, Marie had been awake for a long time. She flung her thin arms round Frau Lechner's neck, kissed her wrinkled cheeks and said:

"I've got to go on a journey to-day, mummy, and perhaps I shan't come back again. We may never see each other again, never! mummy, forgive me all the wrong I've done you. When one is hot-blooded, and there are men about, it's terribly hard for us poor women, mummy. And be as kind as you can to father, he's another poor devil who can't help himself!"

When her mother had gone, Marie wanted to get up and dress. But fit after fit of coughing came and flung her down on her straw mattress, and every time she had to lie and rest for a quarter of an hour with her eyes shut. It was midday before she was able to leave the Melchiorgasse. . . .

Chapter 20—The Trial

THE day had come on which the most sensational trial Vienna had known for centuries was to begin. For days past the trial of the "gentleman murderer" had been the sole subject of conversation, and thousands of people had been asking themselves one question and one only—how they were to obtain admission to the court. Tickets of admission were issued by the President of the High Court, but these had been exhausted long before, and when the selection of the jury by lot began at nine in the morning, the reporters' and solicitors' benches were filled, while hundreds of people waited outside the Court in the hope of at least hearing some details of the trial now and again from the ushers as they went in and out.

The public gallery looked like a theater on an important first night. There sat financial and bank magnates with their wives, famous actors and singers, painters and authors, society ladies and members of the former aristocracy. Packed in serried rows, they

awaited what was to come in a state of feverish excitement.

It was almost an hour before the jury was complete. It consisted mainly of members of the liberal professions. There were two female jurors—one a teacher, the other a doctor. Counsel for the defense was Dr. Valentin; while Tupfer, feared for his sharp tongue, prosecuted for the State. Hofrat Schwarz was President of the Court.

When the prisoner was brought in there were murmurs and whispering in the court. Egon Stirner was faultlessly dressed. He seemed quiet and collected; he kept his flickering eyes half-shut almost all the time.

The indictment was read. It related, baldly, and in logical sequence, Stirner's past, his entrance into Vienna society, his relations with Frau Lia Leid, her terrible death, the search for the murderer, Frau Liane Christens's mission, the murderer's arrest, his confession, as foolish as cowardly, that he had stolen the jewels, and his denial of the charge of murder.

Stirner was put into the witness-box and his examination by the President began. After a few generalities, the President asked the usual question—whether the prisoner pleaded guilty. Stirner replied in a loud voice:

"I am absolutely innocent of having caused Frau Lia Leid's death.!"

"Shall I question you as to what took place, or would you rather give us a connected account?"

Stirner decided in favor of the latter course, and began his story:

"When I became an employee of the Central European Bank, I naturally wished, and endeavored, to attract the attention of the chairman of the Bank, Herr Rosenow, and get into touch with him. Quite by chance, I had an opportunity of doing this. I came across an American paper which had an article in its economic supplement on financial conditions in Austria and, incidentally, sharply criticized certain of the Central European Bank's transactions. I translated the article, went to Herr Rosenow and showed him the original article and the translation, adding that I should like to send the paper a reply dealing with the points raised. Herr Rosenow gave me the material, and when the number of the paper containing my reply was sent to me a month afterwards, I handed it to the chairman. He thanked me and promised to transfer me to the secretaries' office at the earliest opportunity. This was done at a later date.

"One evening late last summer, when Herr Rosenow and his family had returned from the country, I happened to hear Herr Rosenow making an appointment by telephone to meet the solicitor, Dr. Leid, and his wife at the Eisvogel in the Prater. I

went there, too, that evening, and sauntered past Herr Rosenow's little table several times, pretending to be looking for an empty place. I was successful in my object. Herr Rosenow noticed me, whispered to the ladies, called me to his table and invited me to sit down.

"It is difficult and painful for me to speak of what followed; but it must be done, since it is a matter of life and death for me. I sat next to Frau Lia Leid at the table, and was fascinated by her beauty, though I found the general manner and appearance of Fräulein Rosenow, who sat opposite me, more attractive. I saw in Frau Leid a woman full of race instinct, eager for conquest; I felt that there was a possibility of a more intimate acquaintance, and that she was drawn to me from the first moment.

"I need not give details of the course of my friendship with Lia Leid. It is enough to say that I rang her up almost every day at her flat, and she telephoned to me every day at the Bank, and that she very soon made an appointment to meet me. We met at a *café* in the suburbs, went for motor drives round Vienna, and saw each other nearly every day. These meetings caused me considerable expense, which I could not afford on my small income. I began to speculate on the Stock Exchange, though I had practically nothing to meet losses with; I was lucky, however, and soon became convinced that in

the conditions prevailing I only needed plenty of capital to become a rich man—a very rich man.

"It is difficult, if not impossible, to explain here, in sober language, how the desire to become rich took more and more violent hold upon me and pursued me day and night; how I formed plans and abandoned them again. Till one day Lia Leid told me about her jewels and mentioned that she had a pearl necklace of almost incalculable value.

"The situation was becoming—if I may put it so—very favorable to me. Lia and I were agreed that our relationship, which hitherto had been platonic, should become more intimate, and I set about finding a suitable place of meeting, as I could not receive visits from ladies in the furnished room where I lived.

"Just at this time I was invited by my chairman to a supper party, at which Dr. Leid and his wife were also to be present.

"It was Lia, always full of strange caprices and odd whims, who had the idea of spending an hour alone with me immediately before the supper party. I remember every one of her words. She said: 'It will be wonderful to meet at the Rosenows' as if nothing had happened, to chat and dance together like ordinary acquaintances, while our eyes meet and speak of what we have been through.'

"Then she told me about her new evening dress

which had just been made, and I asked almost mechanically if she was going to put on her valuable jewelry. 'If you like, I'll cover myself with diamonds and pearls from head to foot,' she replied, and I assured her, like a man in a dream, that this was my wish.

"I found this place of Frau Merkel's in the Melchiorgasse through an advertisement in the *Tageblatt* the day before the supper, and worked out my plan in every detail."

Dead silence had prevailed while Stirner was speaking. He paused for a moment, and the President said:

"That is to say, you made preparations to murder and rob Frau Leid."

"Not at all. I never thought for a moment of murdering her, but only of getting hold of the jewelry. My plan was as follows: it had been arranged that I should leave the place before Frau Lia. On leaving I would pocket the pearls and as much of the other jewels as possible and get away with them without being noticed.

"According to our arrangement, I came a few minutes before Lia. She had absolutely all her jewelry on. She took it off—the rings, too, at my wish. She laid it all by her vanity bag on the table in the middle of the room. I put my hat on the table in front of the jewelry and the bag, so that the hat was

between them and the bed, and a person lying on the bed could not see the jewelry.

"I will pass over in silence what happened subsequently in the room. Towards nine o'clock I dressed quickly. There was no light on in the room then except for a little lamp on a writing-table in the corner, so that the room was almost dark. Frau Lia remained lying on the bed, and I was able to take a roll of banknotes out of her open bag without the least difficulty and put them in my overcoat pockets along with the pearls, rings, pins, bracelets, and so on. I gave Lia a farewell kiss and went off. . . .

"That is the absolute, perfect truth! All the rest has been told by the two Italian dealers. I turned the jewelry into money at Genoa and then returned to Vienna."

"We will talk about that later," said the President. "You want us to believe, then, that Frau Leid was alive when you left her, and that you never had any intention of murdering her. What was the object, in that case, of your disguising yourself? Why did you put on a false beard and wear a pince-nez?"

"I can easily explain that, sir. When I told Frau Leid about the place of assignation in the Melchiorgasse, I mentioned to her that I had had a mistress in that street some years before, a pretty young girl; and had frequented the salon of a Frau Greifer, who

arranged meetings between men about town and girls.

"Now, although Frau Leid was frivolous, she was very nervous, and she declared categorically that she would not set foot in the Melchiorgasse, as she was afraid I should be recognized there and that all kinds of complications might arise. I had some difficulty in calming her, which I did by promising faithfully to make myself unrecognizable by means of a pointed beard and a pince-nez, and only to speak to Frau Merkel in the dark. I considered this advisable myself, for I should not have cared to be recognized by people who knew the girl I spoke of just now."

"Prisoner, do you not feel yourself that the whole of your case sounds altogether improbable? You confess to the theft; or rather, you had no choice but to do so, seeing that you had been identified by the Italian jewel dealers. But if your story is true, who can have murdered Frau Leid? If you had left her without having robbed her, there would at any rate be a possibility of the landlady or an accomplice of hers having committed the murder in order to get possession of the money and jewelry. But you took both the money and the jewelry. Who, then, could have had any interest in killing Frau Leid?"

"Pardon me, sir; but it is the business of the police to answer your question, which is certainly

quite justified! I can say nothing except that Frau Leid was alive and unharmed when I left her."

"So you left the place of assignation, went into a house close by and took off the false beard. What did you do with it, and with the pince-nez?"

"Put them both in my pocket."

"Then you went in a taxicab to Pötzleinsdorf to the Rosenows' supper party. It must have struck you that Frau Leid was a very long time in coming?"

"Yes, it did; but I thought it was because I had taken the jewelry. I thought Frau Leid would look for it for a long time and at last, completely confused, would go home again to see whether she had really put on her jewelry. For that matter, I was very glad that she did not come, for the thought of meeting her face to face, when I had so basely abused her confidence, and of appearing a thief in her eyes, was intolerable to me. But I assure you, at the risk of being believed by no one, that I only meant to pledge the jewelry. I was quite sure of making the money several times over on the Stock Exchange. And then I should have redeemed the jewelry and restored it to Frau Lia."

A contemptuous outburst of laughter in the spectators' gallery, the skeptical expression on the jurymen's faces, and a "H'm, h'm!" from the prosecuting counsel proved that, indeed, no one in court believed what Stirner had said.

"Well, what did you do when Herr Otto Demel came from the telephone with the news that a beautiful young woman of fashion had been found murdered in the Melchiorgasse, and Dr. Leid fell down in a faint?"

"I was convinced at once that it was Frau Lia. For a moment I was simply horrified at what had happened; but then I told myself that I myself must naturally be suspected of being the murderer. I went to the Melchiorgasse with Herr Demel, but I did not go into the house with him; I went to the Café Payr and waited for him there. On my way to the *café* I remembered that it might be fatal if I were found in possession of the false beard, and pushed it and the pince-nez down through the bars of a manhole. Now, of course, I could not carry out my plan of pawning the jewelry in Vienna, but used a week's holiday which was still due to me to go to Genoa, where I knew there were plenty of dealers who would buy jewelry, even of suspicious origin. I received a million lire from Messrs. Fosci and Barga, returned to Vienna, speculated on the Stock Exchange and brought about a heavy rise in timber shares. I failed to sell out in time; the bears were too quick for me, and so I lost all I had gained through this miserable theft."

Counsel for the prosecution rose.

"Whereupon you enticed your chief's daughter

into your snares. You actually succeeded in inducing a very rich young lady to become engaged to you. Only a few hours before your arrest, however, so that that fine haul came to nothing."

Stirner turned a deep red and drew himself up to his full height.

"I deny, sir, that you have any right to allude to my feelings and intentions towards Fräulein Rosenow. We are not here to discuss that subject."

Counsel for the prosecution jumped up again and was about to reply sharply, but the President signed to him to drop the matter, and himself put a further question to Stirner:

"Among the records of your past career is a statement from the military authorities, who suspect that you, while you were employed by the General Staff, on account of your knowledge of languages, on intelligence work in Switzerland, carried on espionage for France and England at the same time. You are said to have several times enticed Germans from Geneva on to the French soil and given them up to the authorities there."

"I deny that most emphatically. To tell the truth, I made fools of the Austrian military authorities, and the French and English, too. I did no espionage for either the one or the other, but took money from both sides without doing anything whatever to earn it. When I wanted money, I used to go to the

French Consul at Geneva and tell him a fictitious story about having enticed a German over the frontier. It was difficult for the Consul to find out whether what I said was true, and he preferred to believe me without asking any questions."

Stirner's statement caused some amusement among the spectators. In any case, the horror which he had at first inspired was beginning slowly to be dispelled.

The next witnesses were the two Italians from Genoa, who were questioned through an interpreter, and then the cobbler's apprentice, who had seen Stirner with and without a pointed beard. Their statements were uninteresting, as they could only confirm things which Stirner had already admitted.

Only when Frau Merkel, the landlady of the flat at 55 Melchiorgasse, entered the box, was general attention again concentrated on the proceedings.

At first Frau Merkel trembled all over and could not utter a word; but then, when she had calmed herself, she became so rambling, that she reduced the President to despair. First she gave a long-winded account of how and why she let a room; how discreet she was; and how, when the gentleman with the pointed beard and his lady had gone into the room, she had listened at the door once or twice, but had heard nothing in particular. Then she grew excited and told the court how—after the gentleman

had gone—she had waited till nearly ten for the lady to go, and then knocked, but got no answer; and finally called the police, who had the room door opened by a locksmith who lived close by, on which the beautiful society lady was found lying dead on the bed.

The President: "Frau Merkel, attend carefully to what I am going to say, and answer my questions as conscientiously as you can. The prisoner declares that Frau Lia Leid was alive when he left her, so that she must have been murdered between nine and ten. The police doctor found that Frau Leid had been murdered between nine and half-past nine, nearer nine than half-past. If what the prisoner says is true, someone must have slipped into the room immediately after he had left and strangled Frau Leid. No suspicion whatever attaches to you, Frau Merkel, if only for the reason that Stirner has been proved to have stolen the money and jewels, and has, moreover, confessed to it. Therefore, if he did not commit the murder, it was obviously not committed with robbery as the motive. Do you think it possible that anyone entered the flat after Stirner had gone?"

"Quite out of the question, sir! That could only have happened if the door of the flat had been left open. But directly the gentleman had gone I went out of the kitchen into the hall, turned on the light and put the safety chain on the door."

"Why did you do that?" counsel for the defense asked. "You might have assumed that the lady would leave the flat a few minutes later."

Frau Merkel giggled in some embarrassment.

"To tell the truth, sir, I wanted to see what the lady was like; and I thought she wouldn't be able to take the chain off very quickly in the dark, so that I could have a look at her through the chink of the door."

The President, counsel for the prosecution and counsel for the defense smiled at this model of a discreet landlady.

Counsel for the defense: "Frau Merkel, you have to swear to every word you say here. I ask you: are you quite sure that there was no one in the flat at the critical time besides you and the lady and gentleman?"

"Out of the question, sir! The flat consists of just two rooms, kitchen, hall, and a servant's room, which is used as a bathroom and leads into the kitchen, because I can't afford a girl. The room where the lady and gentleman were is the big living-room, and I was going into the other room every minute, because it's my bedroom, and my sewing things are there."

"One more: you consider it absolutely impossible that anyone could have come into the flat or left it on the fatal evening without your knowing it?"

Frau Merkel reflected.

"Come into the flat—nobody could possibly have done that, if only because I'd put the chain up. But gone out—that wouldn't have been so impossible. When the lady stayed so long, I began to think she was a cunning one, and had gone out on tiptoe and put the chain down quietly. That's quite possible, if one takes care. But, when I knocked first and then saw that the room door was locked, then I knew there was something wrong and took fright and ——"

"Very good; we know that already! Has anyone any further question to put to the witness? No? Then call Dr. Leid, please."

There were murmurs and whispers everywhere in court as the eminent solicitor, Dr. Leid, who was so familiar a figure in these scenes, made his appearance as a witness, to give evidence against his wife's murderer. His many acquaintances in court had the impression that Dr. Leid was no longer the wreck he had been only a few weeks before; he seemed to have recovered his mental balance, and the nervous twitching of his features which his friends had noticed with anxiety had disappeared.

After the usual formalities had been disposed of, the President asked:

"Herr Doktor, had you any suspicion whatever

that there might be an illicit relationship between your wife and Egon Stirner?"

"No; not at all. I knew he was one of the many men who paid attention to my wife, and I regarded it as a matter of course that she should meet him of an afternoon, like other men she knew, at the *thés dansants* which are usual nowadays; but I had no kind of suspicion. Indeed, I would not have allowed myself to entertain such a thought as that my wife could be unfaithful to me."

"Did you afterwards ever consider the possibility of Stirner being your wife's murderer?"

"Not in the remotest degree! It was not till Frau Liane Christens came back from Italy and told me of the strange mission she had voluntarily undertaken, that I had no doubt that he was the murderer."

"Do you make any claim for compensation?"

"No; I don't want ever to see or hear anything more of these wretched jewels, which cost my poor wife her life. I would not tolerate their presence in my house even if I could get them back."

Dr. Leid's examination was over; but he remained in court and followed with interest the examination of the next witness, Frau Liane Christens. Her beauty and distinction of bearing excited admiration in court, which was heightened by the remarkable account she gave of her journey to Italy; and more

than once the President was obliged to remind the spectators in no uncertain terms that silence must be preserved. Her evidence over, Frau Liane sat down next to the solicitor.

The next witness was Herr Jonas Rosenow, managing director of the Central European Bank. His appearance in the witness-box greatly intrigued the public, which expected that the great financier would indulge in a furious outburst against the gentleman murderer and robber, who had nearly become his son-in-law. But this anticipation was not realized. Herr Rosenow controlled himself completely; he remained cool and at his ease, and in answer to a question from the defending counsel whether he would have thought the prisoner capable of committing murder for the sake of robbery, he replied:

"Of course not! Do you think I would have allowed my daughter to become engaged to a man I regarded as a criminal?"

After the detective Horak had told the story of Stirner's arrest, the journalist, Otto Demel went into the box. He was the last witness. The President had tactfully refrained from calling Regina Rosenow.

In answer to questions from the President, Demel spoke of his casual acquaintance with Stirner, which had, in fact, become a little closer on the very evening of the murder.

"Did you notice any change in Herr Stirner's demeanor when you told Herr and Frau Rosenow's guests of the murder in the Melchiorgasse?"

"No—if only for the reason that I took no notice of him, and that my whole attention was concentrated on my friend Dr. Leid. When I was starting for the scene of the crime in a car Stirner joined me, and then I remembered having heard some kind of gossip about an intrigue between him and Frau Lia. I asked him if he were not one of the Leids' intimates, and he said that this was not so, without showing any particular embarrassment."

"Were you not struck by the fact that Stirner was unwilling to go with you into the house where the murder had taken place, but waited for you in a *café?"*

"That did not seem to me at all remarkable, for, after all, he had nothing to do there; and it is not everyone's business to inspect a murdered woman's body."

"And at the Café Payr, where you met him later —how did he behave there?"

"There was nothing at all noticeable about his behavior. He seemed to be very much upset, and suddenly showed signs of exhaustion and fatigue, which seemed to me only natural."

Counsel for the defense got up.

"Herr Demel, your profession must have made

you a good judge of men. Now, would you, without any knowledge of incriminating facts, take my client for a man who would commit a murder for robbery?"

Counsel for the prosecution protested against this leading question, but the President decided to allow the witness to answer. Demel said:

"I must confess that I did not care for Herr Stirner. He made on me the impression of being an unscrupulous climber, and his flickering, restless eyes are not those of an honorable, straightforward man. But I really cannot see in him the typical characteristics of the man of violence, let alone the murderer. Above all, the signs of degeneration in the shape of the ears and the skull are absent in him."

The prosecuting counsel laughed loudly.

"I must remind you of Hugo Schenk, who murdered five or six women. He was a very handsome man, with gentle eyes and without any indications of criminality whatever."

The President had the prisoner put into the witness-box again.

"Prisoner, you are a man of intelligence, and you yourself must feel that no one in court can believe your story. Would you not prefer to make a confession, which might have the effect of mitigating your sentence?"

Stirner's lips quivered, and he replied hesitatingly and in a low voice:

"I know perfectly well that I am a lost man and shall end my life in prison. I know, too, that if I confessed to the murder I should perhaps get off with fifteen years' imprisonment.

"But I have not committed a murder; no, not even a theft. I did confess before to having stolen Frau Lia Leid's jewelry. But now, when you, sir, question me so closely—and I shall perhaps never have another opportunity of saying anything in public—I declare that my confession went far beyond the actual facts. What really happened was this. The day before I asked Frau Leid, half in joke, half seriously, if she would lend me a few hundred millions for a big transaction on the Stock Exchange, in which I was sure of gaining large sums. She declared that she had no sum of any size at her disposal, and asked me to explain to her precisely what Stock Exchange transactions I contemplated. What I said made the position clear to her, and she offered me all her jewelry to pawn of her own accord. 'But what about your husband?' I asked. 'Pooh!' she replied; 'if he notices that I'm not wearing jewelry any more, I'll tell him I don't feel inclined to wear it at the moment. And in a few days or weeks you'd be able to give me the jewelry back again.'"

"I did not go into the matter any further; but I

was absolutely determined to pawn the jewels. I had no opportunity of speaking to her again about it; when we met at Frau Merkel's I did not care to refer to it; and the upshot was that when I went away I took all the jewels with me, as well as the twenty millions in cash which she had pressed upon me to free me from the money difficulties I was in at that time. I thought that when she noticed that the jewelry had gone she would realize at once how things stood. Later, at the Rosenows', I felt very unhappy about it; I thought that Lia might be distressed and annoyed, and I quite dreaded the moment when I should meet her. Then, when I learned the whole terrible truth, I had obviously no alternative but to turn the jewels into money abroad, as I could not get rid of them in Vienna.

"You may ask why I did not say this to the magistrate, or during my examination just now. Because I knew quite well that not a word of it would be believed, and that I should only make my position worse by telling a story which sounded so fantastic. But now, at the last moment, I have decided to do so, because I see that I am done for in any case."

Indeed, the expressions on the faces of the judges, and the murmuring and laughter among the spectators, proved that they did not believe a word Egon Stirner said.

This concluded the evidence, and the President called on counsel for the prosecution.

Chapter 21—The Great Sensation

TUPFER, counsel for the prosecution, spoke with merciless severity. The prisoner at the bar, he said, was typical of a new and detestable age —a fortune-hunter in the worst sense of the word, a grabber who wanted to become rich at any price, not through hard productive work, but without trouble, in a single day, at the expense of the community. And if it were easier and more convenient to him, over the bodies of those who stood in his way. A fortune-hunter and a woman-hunter! And he had cleverly combined the pursuit of money and the pursuit of women. He had insinuated himself into the wealthy family of his business chief, used his footing there to seek out a victim, and found one in the beautiful, frivolous Frau Leid. He was determined to obtain possession of her magnificent jewels and to speculate on a large scale with the proceeds. But to get these jewels he must dispose of Frau Leid. The story the prisoner had invented to get his head out of the noose was foolish and non-

sensical. He wanted the jury to believe that he had taken Frau Leid's jewelry with her consent, gone off with it, and that then a ghostly visitant had come, and. . . .

The prosecuting counsel's speech was interrupted by a strange disturbance. The spectators' heads turned towards the entrance, whence loud talking —a woman's voice raised in entreaty, and a man's angry replies were heard.

"What is the matter?" the President called.

There was silence for a moment, then the words: "For Christ's sake, let me in," loudly uttered by a woman's voice, were heard plainly throughout the court.

The court, officials and spectators alike, became uneasy. A cold shiver ran down the backs of all present, and a lady screamed aloud. Everyone felt that something beyond his immediate comprehension was happening.

The President called again.

"What is going on out there?"

Then a woman forced her way in, with an usher holding her by the arm, and screamed in a piercing voice:

"For God's sake let me in, sir; I have a statement to make!"

The President consulted rapidly with his two assistants and then made a sign to the usher. The dis-

turber of the peace was released, and staggered forward to the bar of the court.

The spectators had leapt to their feet; everyone wanted to see her. She was a young woman with a dead white face, on which her scarlet-tinted lips stood out like two lines of blood. There were loud cries; a tumult broke out; ushers ran excitedly up and down, and the President called loudly:

"Silence, or I shall have the court cleared!"

Stirner himself leant forward and stared at the young woman as though unable to believe his own eyes. The girl was about to speak, but before she could utter a word, a terrible fit of coughing shook her. Drops of blood ran over her chin and dripped on to the floor.

At last quiet was restored. There was a dead silence, in which those present could hear each other breathe.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" the President asked.

"My name is Marie Lechner, and I strangled Frau Lia Leid with my own hands!"

A hundred throats emitted one single piercing yell. Even the jurymen leapt up and pressed forward; the journalists rushed towards the bar; and a tumult arose such as had never been seen before in the High Court. The President had difficulty in obtaining a hearing, and the excitement was not sub-

dued until he declared in a voice of thunder that if the slightest sound were made he would have the court cleared.

"A lunatic, no doubt," he said under his breath to his assistants and the prosecuting counsel; and then, gently, to Marie Lechner:

"So you murdered Frau Lia Leid? Well, tell us how it happened."

And Marie Lechner told her story. She spoke quietly and in an absent-minded manner, as if she were talking to herself, with her eyes fixed on the ceiling, never looking either to right or left. Her voice was level and monotonous, as though she were relating something that did not concern her personally. It was a tragic story she had to tell—a drama of guilt and vengeance, of sorrow and pain. She spoke so fluently and connectedly that neither the President nor the prosecuting or defending counsel were obliged to interrupt her with a single question.

"I am not twenty-one yet," she said; "and I was only just sixteen when the war ended and father came home a cripple, bringing misery and want with him. I was going to a commercial school then, and I used to sit next to a pretty, coquettish Jewish girl called Lia Holzer, whom I took a dislike to at once. She was just as poor as most of us girls, but she was always much better dressed; she wore silk stock-

ings and pretty shoes, and if anyone asked her where she got them from, she laughed scornfully and said men were so kind and gave her anything she wanted, without her giving them a single kiss in return. She was lazy and learnt nothing; but all the masters were in love with her, so that she got better reports than I, who used to work and write at home for hours on end. I was a very pretty girl, too; and men used to follow me on my way home. But when I walked with Lia she contrived to make them all look at her, and only her. She used to flirt so shamelessly in the street that I once told her I wouldn't walk with her any more. Then she was rude, and ran away from me, calling: 'I shall be glad not to have to walk with you; anyone can see ten yards away that you're only a common working-girl.'

"From that time we hated each other, and did not speak to one another any more.

"Lia went through another language course; but I had to leave, because my mother, who had begun to go out washing in other people's houses, could not pay the fees any longer. I took a post as clerk in a small shipping firm. The year 1920 was a terribly bad year for us. There was misery at home; father earned nothing and spent his pension on drink; he sold our beds and even mother's sewing machine; and my salary was so small that it wouldn't even keep me in shoes."

Marie Lechner began to cough again. The handkerchief she held to her lips became blood-red. On a sign from the President, an usher brought her a chair, so that she could continue her story seated.

"I had never had anything to do with any man, because I had seen, often enough, in the Melchiorgasse—where I had grown up—how that ends. But one evening in the spring—it was the 13th of April, I know that as well as if it were to-day—I was going home late one evening in pouring rain, tired, hungry and utterly wretched. A gust of wind blew my umbrella inside out. I stood there feeling quite desperate, and began to cry.

"At that moment a tall, well-dressed man came up to me. He laughed at my despair, offered me the shelter of his umbrella, and we walked together for a short way. Then he invited me to go to a restaurant in the Bellaria with him to wait till the downpour, which was getting heavier, was over. I was seventeen, gentlemen, I hardly knew what sex meant, and he was so kind and friendly to me! I went with him; he asked me what I would have and ordered a *paniertes Schnitzel* for me; and it was so nice and warm in the lovely restaurant, and I was gay and merry and talked freely; I told him how poor I was and how miserable my home was.

"The gentleman stroked my hands and said there

would be no more misery for me. Then he told me his name was Egon Stirner."

There was dead silence in court. The young woman's rattling breath could be plainly heard. Stirner sat hunched up on his bench; the President, counsel for the prosecution and the defense, and the jury craned forward and listened eagerly.

"Soon I loved him as one only can love at seventeen; and when he took me home to the furnished rooms he lived in then, and took me in his arms, I was in the seventh heaven of happiness, and gave myself to him without another thought."

She added in a low voice, so low that only those who sat right in front of her could hear:

"If he had loved me only one thousandth part as much as I loved him, I should have been a good, honest woman to-day; and he would not have been in the dock, nor I standing here to confess my sins, before I am flung into a hole like a mad dog."

Marie passed her white, wasted hand over her forehead and continued, aloud:

"For a time I was in Paradise. Egon bought me clothes and shoes; we went to the pictures together every evening and had a lovely supper afterwards; and at night I lay in his arms and asked him a hundred times: 'You really love me, don't you, Egon, and I'm not only a plaything to you?'

"But his 'I love you' became more and more

weary and lukewarm; and one day he told me it couldn't go on. He had serious money difficulties; the agency business which for a time had brought him in a good deal had come to an end, and he was no longer in a position to do what he had been doing for me. In any case, he said, our relationship had lasted a long time; I was young and pretty and was sure to find another friend soon.

"I was not living with my mother any more, and I had given up my post a long time before; I was entirely dependent on Egon, and would sooner have killed myself than gone back to the Melchiorgasse. And yet the Melchiorgasse was my fate.

"A friend took me to a dressmaker called Frau Greifer who lives in the Melchiorgasse, and she took care of me. In other words, she sucked my blood and my honor out of my body. She made me expensive clothes and hats, till I was no longer my own property, but hers; she introduced me to rich men, and turned me into a smart, fashionable prostitute. It's very quickly done, gentlemen, almost quicker than one can imagine it. At first you're frightened, and resist; then you say to yourself: 'Just this once and never again'; then you get used to the champagne and the dirty jokes, the dancing and motor drives, the silk dresses and jewels; and at last you don't know whose mistress you really

are, and have to think before you remember who you were with last night.

"In the meantime my friendship with Egon Stirner continued. When he had time for me, nothing would induce me to leave him and we always spent Sunday together. I hated and loved him, saw in him my destroyer and my lord and master, and he seemed to be very fond of me again; he often talked of how, when he had become rich, he would free me from Frau Greifer. He had always been very angry with me for going to Frau Greifer's. At last, however, we began to see less and less of one another.

"Certainly I was one of the best-known girls in Vienna. I only went to the best night restaurants; when I went into the Tabarin or the Trocadero, the men used to cheer me, and one of them even wrote a song about me, which was sung everywhere. The chorus ran: 'It's Mary, Lovely Mary of the Bar.'

"Things went on like this for a few years. I lived on the fat of the land. In the spring of last year I went to Italy and Switzerland with a rich Rumanian; I was to have gone to Paris with him, but my longing for Egon was so great that I left the Rumanian one day and came back to Vienna. The first thing I did was to go and see Egon, who had gone into a bank a long time before. He received me very coolly, told me that he had at last succeeded in get-

ting into Vienna society, and hinted that a beautiful, rich woman of high social position was his mistress.

"A girl like me had, of course, no right to be jealous; I had to bite on the bullet and behave as if it were the most natural thing in the world for him, who had made a woman of me, to tell me about his *amours*.

"I had no money; so I went back to Frau Greifer in the Melchiorgasse. I slunk past the house where my poor mother lived. I thought of her continually; but the idea of going to see her terrified me. I somehow felt that if once I got back there I should never get free again.

"One afternoon, a few days later, I went into the Bristol grill-room with a gentleman who wanted to dance with me there. But I came straight out again, for there was Egon Stirner dancing with a pretty young woman, beautifully dressed. I happened to catch a look that passed between the two, and that look said so much that of a sudden I became wildly, madly jealous. The young woman was Lia Holzer, who had been at the commercial school with me.

"The man I was with was much annoyed at my going away, but he explained the situation to me. 'Yes,' he said, 'her maiden name was Holzer. She has been married for three years to Dr. Leid, a well-known man, and immensely rich. But she's

quite indecently unfaithful to the poor fellow. Egon Stirner is after her now. She's a devilish woman—consumes more men than a smoker matches.'

"I got drunk on champagne that night, and danced so long and so madly that I had a hemorrhage. The doctor said one of my lungs was affected, and that I must live quietly if I didn't want to break down.

"But I only went on drinking harder, and a friend of mine showed me how to use morphine."

A fresh fit of coughing weakened Marie so that she collapsed altogether. A draught of water gave her strength to continue her story.

"I met Egon again and asked him about the matter, making a show of complete indifference. He frankly admitted that he meant to make Lia Leid his mistress. 'It's too silly,' he said, 'but I can't take her home, she won't go to a hotel, and it's very hard now to find a decent place to go. I've got an address through one of the papers and am going to see the room to-morrow. By a curious chance it happens to be in the Melchiorgasse. A Frau Merkel, at No. 55.'

"I cannot explain now what passed through my mind then. I only know that I was filled with a helpless, raging hatred against the woman. She had been put over my head at the school, she had insulted and wounded me, and while I had been

seduced and deserted and flung into the mire, she had become the wife of a rich, distinguished man. And that did not keep her from betraying her husband and stealing other women's men. I woke the next night thinking of Lia. I saw red, and if she had been there I would have stabbed her to the heart without mercy.

"Next day two things happened—quite chance occurrences—which sealed my fate. In the morning I met Frau Lia Leid in the Graben, dressed like a princess, with one of those tiny little dogs in her arms which society women have nowadays—in order to excite the man they are after by kissing and caressing the little beasts in his presence. We passed quite close to one another; but Lia ostentatiously looked the other way and pulled her dress tightly about her so that I might not touch it.

"I was furious. I went crimson, and spat so violently that people stared at me in surprise. She, a thousand times worse than the lowest, most disreputable woman of the streets, who has to give herself to any drunkard in order not to die of hunger—she shrank from contact with me. Would not say 'good morning' to a 'cocotte'!

"The other incident took place in the afternoon. I met Egon in the Opernring, but he did not see me. Instinctively without knowing why, I followed him. He sauntered along the Ring, went

across to the German People's Theater, and then turned off down the Melchiorgasse. I guessed that he was going to look at the room he had spoken of. I hid in a doorway and waited till he came out of No. 55 again.

"Confused thoughts raced through my morphia-beclouded brain. I was certain of one thing only—that I must completely spoil their *rendezvous* next day!

"I went into No. 55, drew my veil close over my face and rang Frau Merkel's bell. She asked what I wanted, and I said I had heard she had a room to let. 'Yes,' she said, 'but you've come a few minutes too late. A gentleman has just taken it and paid in advance for the whole month.'

"I said that I was very sorry to hear it, and added that I needed it urgently just for the next afternoon and would pay a very good price for it. 'Out of the question,' she said; 'the gentleman is coming tomorrow evening with his lady.' 'What a pity!' I said; 'but perhaps the gentleman won't keep it for more than a month. Can I look at the room?'

"The woman asked me to come in. I was trembling all over with agitation and saw hardly anything but a huge, wide sofa with a counterpane over it.

"I spent the rest of the day and the whole night at Frau Greifer's. Next day I slept at my room in the

Gumpendorferstrasse till the afternoon. Then I took a good injection of morphine and went to No. 55 Melchiorgasse. I crept upstairs to the top and down again, and did not know what I really meant to do. Suddenly, as I was standing on the landing just above Frau Merkel's flat, the door of the flat opposite opened and an old woman came out and rang Frau Merkel's bell. The two women stood in the passage just below me, and I heard the old lady telling Frau Merkel about a letter she had just had from her son in America. She showed her the letter, and as it was dark they went to the passage window.

"While they were laboriously spelling out the letter, I crept down and, while their backs were turned, slipped into the flat through the open door and was in the room. I looked round me in a desperate hurry. Where could I hide? The sofa stood in front of me, big, wide and inviting. One, two—I knelt down, lifted up the counterpane and crept under the sofa. I am slim and could lie comfortably, in fact, I could turn over and move about; and no one could see me.

"An hour passed, two hours, while I lay under the sofa, stifled and half unconscious. My bones began to ache and I thought I could not stand it any longer, especially as I had to keep myself from coughing. Then Egon came in. My first thought

was to crawl out, reproach him with all he had done to me, and call him a scoundrel. But I reflected quickly. He was stronger than I, he would strike me and throw me out, perhaps even give me in charge. And then he would be alone with Lia! No; I would rather wait till she was there, too; I wanted to do something that would make her think twice before she enticed another woman's man away from her again.

"Lia came. I heard them whispering, heard their kisses, heard the sweet, false words: 'little mouse' and 'little girl' and 'do you really love me, too?'—all those words I knew so well, which reminded me of the time when I was an innocent girl, and I had to stuff my fist into my mouth to prevent myself from crying out loud.

"I don't know how long I lay there. At last, as if in a dream, I heard them referring indifferently to some party to which both of them seemed to be going. I gathered from their talk that he was going at once and that she would stay a little longer. I heard a long kiss, a man's firm step, the door open and shut—I knew that Lia was alone and still lying on the bed.

"I cannot say exactly now what happened next. I only know that I crawled out slowly, knelt by the bed, and saw Lia lying there, staring at me with wide open eyes, full of unspeakable horror. And

without saying a word, and before she could utter a scream, I laid my fingers round the soft white throat and pressed them together with a strength I had never possessed before. She gurgled and struck out with her arms, and I let go. The body before me gave one or two convulsive movements and did not move again.

"I fled as though pursued by Furies. I crept on tiptoe into the dark hall, took out the key instinctively, in order to lock the door of the room from outside, and reached the flat door without making a sound. My hand came in contact with a chain; I took it down carefully, and was in the passage. I rushed down the stairs and was swallowed up in the darkness of the Melchiorgasse. I threw the key away, and knew no more till I was in my room in the Gumpendorferstrasse.

"From that day I went downhill rapidly. I got drunk every night and made scenes, so that I was no longer admitted to the good restaurants. My cough became worse and worse, and men who were at all particular would have nothing more to do with me when they found out that I spat blood. I spent my nights in the lowest night *cafés,* and the inevitable happened; my health broke down altogether. . . . I was arrested in a raid on a low-class hotel, taken to the Women's Hospital, and from there I went back to the cursed Melchiorgasse, which

always swallows you up again and never lets you go."

Marie's last words were only a murmur. The agitation of the spectators, who had listened breathlessly for an hour to this fearful confession, now found vent. Words like "monstrous," "fearful," "horrible," were heard; a lady fainted and had to be carried out, one of the women jurists was weeping bitterly, and the President himself was so moved that some minutes passed before he could restore order and quiet. He drank the glass of water that stood before him at a swallow and turned to Marie Lechner.

"The whole story you have told us here," he said, "is hardly comprehensible; it sounds like the fantastic product of a fevered brain. Tell us why you have never confessed till to-day, the day of the trial! You must have known that Egon Stirner had been arrested on the terrible suspicion of having murdered Frau Lia Leid!"

Marie shook her head.

"I knew nothing at all! At first I read in the papers that no trace of the murderer had been found. After that I read no more papers at all; I was always drunk and never troubled about anything; I almost forgot that I had committed a murder. It was only when I was at home again with my father and mother in the Melchiorgasse that I began to be tor-

mented by dreams, my conscience began to prick me, and I became afraid. And yesterday, when I felt quite plainly, after a hemorrhage, that it was all over with me and that I had a few days to live at most, I was worried and tormented and had to make a clean breast of it at any price, at the risk of being dragged out of bed and taken to prison. I asked mother to fetch a clergyman, so that I could make my confession.

"A young priest came, and I told him everything. He wept terribly and asked me if I was so bad that I was willing to let another be punished for my crime. That was how I learnt for the first time that Egon was to be sentenced to-day for murder. I had no idea that he had taken the jewels. I swore to the priest that I would appear before the earthly judges; and then I received the absolution, for he said that my sufferings more than outweighed my sins. And now, gentlemen, I'm glad to die and have no grudge against any man—I forgive you everything, too, Egon. . . . I love you still."

Egon Stirner buried his face in his hands and sobbed loudly. The judges and prosecuting counsel wiped their eyes; the court was full of the sounds of weeping. . . .

The President called upon Frau Merkel, who had remained in court, to go into the witness-box again.

"You have heard Marie Lechner's story," he said.

"Do you recognize her as the lady who was at your flat the day before the murder and inspected the room?"

"Yes, sir. I remember it all now quite clearly. It all happened as the poor girl said. I remember the letter from America, too, which my neighbor, Frau Hummerl, showed me. It's quite true; I did leave the door open behind me then!"

Counsel for the prosecution rose to speak.

"After the appalling revelations which we have heard, I withdraw the charge of murder and robbery against Egon Stirner and ask that the documents be returned to the examining magistrate. Instead, I charge Marie Lechner, who appears to have committed murder, or rather, to judge from her own statement, manslaughter, and propose that she be removed to the prison hospital."

The judges gave effect to the request of counsel for the prosecution, and refused a request from counsel for the defense that Egon Stirner be released on bail.

So ended the most sensational and exciting trial that Vienna had ever known.

Marie Lechner was taken to the prison hospital, but she did not live out the day. She died, late that evening, quite alone, for her mother, who was washing somewhere in a strange house, was searched for in vain.

Egon Stirner had to return to prison. He was now able to look forward with fresh courage to the trial of his case. Now that the charge against him had been modified, he would be tried not before a jury, but at petty sessions.

Chapter 22—Solutions

OTTO DEMEL left Vienna next day for Paris and London, where he was to write articles for his paper on political and social questions. He did not see Grete before leaving; he merely wrote her a letter of farewell, enclosed a considerable sum of money, and informed her that on the first of the coming month she could enter a transport firm in the Kautgasse as a shorthand typist.

Grete wept bitterly on reading the letter. She felt herself unspeakably humiliated! She had to accept money from a man who despised her; she owed him her salvation from ruin and disgrace; through him she had obtained work and the possibility of earning money; and yet she longed, above all things, to go to him and tell him angrily how hard and unjust he had been towards her.

She had, of course, no idea that he, too, felt thoroughly miserable and that his thoughts ever and again flew back to her—to her who so lately had been even more to him than he himself realized.

After the unexpected end of the trial Dr. Karl Leid had left the court with Frau Liane Christens. They walked in the soft spring air up the Währingerstrasse towards the Türkenschanzpark, near which her villa was—silent, deeply moved, and wrapped in thought.

The divorce proceedings had been concluded long before, and a few days ago the artist and his young new wife had left Vienna for Rome, where they were to settle permanently. The villa and its valuable furniture had remained in Frau Christens's possession.

It was twilight when the two reached the house. Frau Liane hesitated for a moment, then she invited Dr. Leid to come in and have tea with her.

"We're both solitary birds," she said; "and I'm afraid of being alone to-day."

Karl Leid accepted the invitation with pleasure. It gave him a comfortable feeling to follow Liane's soft, feminine movements as she made tea herself in the dining-room, cut bread and butter, drew forward the little table with the liquor bottles on it and handed him what he wanted.

"What do you think of doing in the future?" Dr. Leid asked, when they had sat for some time in silence.

She smiled wearily.

"In the future? Is there any future for me, do you

think? Does not my life now consist entirely of pasts? I know what you will say—that I am still young, that I have years of enjoyment before me! Arithmetically, of course I have. But in reality? I am independent, I have as much money as I want, have no children, parents or relations to look after. I haven't even any friends, except you, and you are such a busy man. The artists and writers who came to our house were his friends, and it is only seldom that I have been able to make a real friend of a woman. I shall often go abroad, no doubt; but that isn't an unmixed pleasure for a solitary woman. You are lonely, too, of course; but you are a man and have your profession. You have scarcely time to think about yourself. Your work compensates you for the lack of a wife and of friends."

Dr. Leid shook his head.

"I'm utterly sick of my work! My whole life has been nothing but work. And what have I got out of it? I've been so wrapped up in my work that I've never really lived; where others have delightful memories, adventures and happiness, I have nothing but the recollection of cases won and cases lost. Perhaps you won't believe me, but I have never been to Paris, London, or Italy; I have never been outside the old Monarchy!

"I have a very able and gifted clerk who is just getting married," Dr. Leid continued. "I'd like

nothing better than to hand my office over to him, withdraw into private life and try to make up for the time I've lost."

It was dark now, and the room was perfectly quiet. The sweet, heavy scent of jessamine was wafted in through the open window. Frau Liane rose and turned on the switch of the veiled chandelier, filling the room with a soft bluish light. Dr. Leid had risen, too. They stood close together, face to face, and looked into each other's eyes. A roguish smile lit up her face and made it as young as a girl's, while he held out his hands to her, with a boy's awkwardness and shyness.

"Liane," he asked in a low voice, almost a whisper, "shall we travel our road together?"

She bent her head and flung her arms round his neck.

* * * * *

Egon Stirner's case was retried at the end of May. This time he was charged only with theft. This trial also keenly interested the public, and the little court was packed with curious spectators.

Nothing particularly sensational occurred. Stirner adhered to his previous statements; the evidence of the two Italian dealer-receivers was this time read; and the only witness heard was Josef Horak, who had received a special promotion to the grade of Kriminal Kommissar. The defense was based mainly

on the plea that Stirner had taken Lia Leid's jewelry with her consent, and had firmly intended only to pawn it, and to redeem and restore it with his first winnings on the Stock Exchange. This story, indeed, seemed quite credible, especially as Stirner had gained large sums immediately after the sale of the jewelry.

The prosecuting counsel, for his part, dealt with the prisoner very leniently, and even suggested in his concluding speech that the court should inflict a milder punishment than the penalty fixed by law —from one to five years' imprisonment. This made the task of counsel for the defense all the easier. He dwelt on the fearful tortures which Stirner had had to bear during the months in which he had lain under the suspicion of having committed murder.

The court found Stirner guilty of theft, seeing that he had sold the jewelry, but admitted that there were strongly extenuating circumstances and sentenced him only to six months' imprisonment. Four of these months were set off against the period for which he had been under arrest, and the other two were remitted on his consenting to be bound over for a year. He was, therefore, able to leave the Courts of Justice a free man.

It was late in the evening when all the formalities were concluded, and Stirner stood in the Alsterstrasse with his suit-case in his hand and a supply

of money in his wallet which would not do much more than supply his needs for a few days. He stood for a moment undecided. The warm spring air almost intoxicated him; he took a few staggering steps forward. And now, for the first time he fully realized the depths to which he had fallen.

What should he do now? His bachelor rooms had been relet long ago. For that matter, he could not remain in Vienna at all. He must go out into the world again, begin the battle of life anew.

Stirner's frame stiffened. Yes; he would fight. But with honorable weapons, with the physical and intellectual powers which Nature had given him. He was still young, strong and healthy! life lay before him; he need only exert his will-power, endure—and forget!

As these thoughts were taking shape in his brain, he was assailed by swift, painful memories of Regina Rosenow and Marie Lechner—two victims of his unscrupulousness, his savage, unrestrained passion for money, a career, a life of luxury! One was dead, ruined by him as thousands of other poor little girls are ruined by men to whom their conquest is only an incident in the eternal battle of the sexes, and who do not want to keep them, but only to possess them.

Marie had forgiven him almost with her dying breath. But the other—Regina, that proud, spoilt

young woman! Had not she, too, been mortally wounded by him—was he not her murderer, too—the murderer of her soul?

Stirner's cheeks were pale and hollow from his long imprisonment, and a lump now rose in his throat as he thought of Regina. He longed for her and knew she was lost to him; tears of shame and regret filled his eyes.

There, right in front of him, stood a large, closed private car. He had not noticed it before. Suddenly the door was opened, and a soft voice, with a suggestion in it of repressed sobs, called him by name. He looked up in surprise, and he did not know whether he was awake or in a dream when Regina held out her hand to him, and cried:

"Jump in quickly, and let's be off!"

The car sprang noiselessly forward; soft, warm lips were pressed to his; tender hands stroked his hair; and, as in a dream, he heard Regina speaking.

"Poor boy!" she was saying. "To think what you have had to suffer—what we both have suffered! But it's all right now; we are together and nothing can part us again! I've taken a room for you at the Hôtel Klomser; it's so quiet there, and nobody will recognize you or worry you. We'll go there now and talk everything over!"

They sat in the hotel room side by side, very close together, and Regina told her story. She said but

little of the inward change which had taken place in her.

"We were both of us on the wrong track, Egon," she said. "We both thought we could disregard all those ideas to which centuries of tradition have given the force of law; and we have both of us been brought to our right mind in the most brutal manner. But don't let us talk any more of the past. Let it lie behind us like a hideous, dangerous illness, which one doesn't want to be reminded of. And we can never reproach each other with anything."

Stirner pressed the girl passionately to him; then he suddenly released her and said in a dejected voice:

"But what shall we do, Regina? I am a shipwreck of a man, without a career, who has got to fight my way through life as best I can. And you are not a girl who could put up with poverty and hardship."

Regina laughed—once more the clear, confident laugh of old days.

"No, darling," she said; "life can have plenty of adventures in it, as we have seen; but it isn't a story in the *Family Herald*. I've arranged everything. I was really sorry for my poor papa, who would have liked so much to marry me to a prince, but I couldn't do anything for him. After some stormy scenes, in which dear, good mamma took my side bravely, he had to give in. In a month your name will be

changed; then we'll get married and go to Buenos Ayres. Papa has bought most of the shares in the Argentina Land Bank and you are to take over one of the chief posts in it. Unromantic, but practical! And I'm not a bit afraid of you, though you are a rascal! What does it matter to me? I know you love me, and that's all that counts!"

Once more the old frivolous Regina; but Stirner felt that she loved him warmly and sincerely. He clasped her in his arms and covered her face with kisses.

Chapter 23—Away from the Joyless Alley

OTTO DEMEL was in London when a subpœna to appear as a witness at the trial of Frau Greifer and her accomplices was forwarded to him. His journalistic work over, he was returning in any case, so he was able to arrange his journey in such a way that he would arrive in Vienna on the day of the trial. His train, however, was very late, so that he had not time to drive home from the West station, but sent his luggage to the Melchiorgasse and himself went straight to the Courts of Justice.

His influence had, as he had hoped, succeeded in keeping Grete out of the whole shady business. Moreover, after he had had a long interview with the Chief of Police, the latter had released all the girls arrested in the raid, and only Frau Greifer, Fräulein Henriette, and the porter and his wife had been prosecuted. All the girls except Grete had been called as witnesses at the trial.

The proceedings, which were held *in camera,* threw a deplorable sidelight on the underworld of city life. As Demel was one of the first witnesses called, he was able to be present during the rest of the trial, and it was painful to him to realize the crimes which are daily committed against the victims of an imperfect social system.

All the girls examined in the witness-box told how they had been exploited by men and by the procuress; they described how they had, step by step, involved themselves in the morass which never releases those who go astray in it.

Kriminal Kommissar Dr. Kellner gave a vivid account of the incidents he had seen, and said that he had given the prearranged signal for the entry of the police at the moment when a girl was about to be forcibly undressed and dragged on to the daïs.

The President asked whether the girl was among the witnesses present. Kellner, slightly embarrassed, replied that she was not. He exchanged glances with Demel, and declared that the girl had disappeared amid the general confusion.

A girl with black bobbed hair raised her hand.

"Please, sir; I know her," she said; "she lives near Frau Greifer. Her Christian name is Grete. She never went on the daïs, and never went to the room with a man."

The President checked her; the matter had no

further interest for him. But the blood rushed to Demel's face. What? Could Grete have remained pure amid all this foulness? He bit his lips. He remembered with pain that when Grete had wanted to speak to him that evening he had not allowed her to say a word.

Demel shut his eyes. He saw once more the girl's sweet, delicate face and the sad, bewildered eyes with which she had looked at him that night, when he had given her money instead of words of consolation.

The trial ended in the evening. The prisoners were sentenced to several months' imprisonment. Otto Demel leapt into a taxi-cab, feverish with impatience. Quick, quick! he must go to Grete at once, ask for an explanation, and make her what amends he could!

After Demel's departure Grete had taken up the post with the transport company. She was better paid than in Herr Wöss's office, and she contrived to keep herself and her relations on her salary, without touching Demel's money. The servant had been dismissed immediately after the raid at Frau Greifer's. All five of them lived once more on turnip-tops and potatoes, and Grete was gradually selling the smart clothes she had obtained. Her young life was gray, dismal, void of pleasure.

She thought of Otto Demel with mingled pain

and bitterness. Certainly he had dragged her out of the slough in which, but for him, she would have been stifled; but he had been hard and unjust towards her; he had hurt her more than the low, brutal frequenters of Frau Greifer's *salon* could have done.

Her recent experiences had deprived Grete of such illusions and *naïveté* as she had possessed once. Now, when she lay awake at night, tormented by headache, she saw her future clear and plain before her eyes. She would continue to starve, wither and grow old before her time, see her little sister ruined in the joyless alley, and Erich, hard-working and gifted as he was, obliged to leave the Gymnasium at fourteen to earn money instead of becoming a student; till at last, weary of starvation and misery, she would sell herself to anyone who came along—if it were not too late then, and her skinny body and worn face should not have ceased to attract men.

Grete came home tired and listless on the evening of the day of Frau Greifer's trial. She had awaited the day with great anxiety, still fearing that she would be dragged into the case, and she had drawn a breath of relief when she had seen from the late evening papers that her name had not been mentioned. The brief reports of the trial did not state that Otto Demel had appeared as a witness.

Erich ran to meet her in the hall, with a joyous shout:

"Grete, Herr Demel's come back!"

The blood rushed to her cheeks with such force that Else pertly advised her to control herself, as Herr Demel had already asked several times if she were in. Just then the bell in his room rang. Erich ran in and returned with a message that Demel would like to see her for a moment.

Frau Rumfort, who of late had become thinner and sicklier than ever, said sadly that Demel was certainly going to give notice, while the old gentleman, in blustering tones, expressed his indignation that a general's granddaughter should have to go to the room of an "outsider" of a journalist, whom, moreover, he suspected of Socialist opinions.

Grete stood on the threshold and pretended not to see the hands which Otto held out to her. She said, in a very low voice:

"I'm glad you've come back, Herr Demel. What can I do for you?"

Demel stared at the girl, quite disconcerted. How she had changed in a few weeks! How deeply the pain she had suffered was imprinted on her face! She was, indeed, still charming and pretty, but anæmia and under-nourishment were leaving their marks on her hollow cheeks and in her deep-set

eyes, and her whole bearing spoke of hopeless weariness.

Demel drew a long breath.

"Fräulein Grete," he said, "I was very hard and perhaps unjust towards you on that dreadful night. You wanted to tell me something, and I refused to listen to you. All these weeks the recollection of my unkindness has tormented me, and I have longed for a chance of talking it over with you."

The corners of Grete's mouth quivered.

"There's no object in it, Herr Demel! You were quite right to despise me; you couldn't do anything else. But that's over now; I'm a poor, honest working-girl again, and we had better not talk about these disgusting things any more. I should only like to ask you to take back the money you left here for me when you went away. I know now that a poor girl compromises herself seriously if she takes money from strange men."

Demel felt as if he had been struck with a whip. He went right up to Grete and said in an eager, passionate tone:

"Grete, things can't stay like this between us! I was detestable that night, I know! But you have no idea how I felt when I saw you there. You can have no idea of it, because you don't know how dear you had become to me. I knew it myself when my grief

and rage at what I was obliged to believe woke me abruptly from a beautiful dream."

"What you were obliged to believe? Don't you believe it any longer?"

"No, Grete; I don't believe it any longer! Not only because the part you had played was explained at the trial to-day, but because in the depths of my heart—in my subconsciousness—I have always felt that it was impossible that you should have gone to the bad."

Grete drew herself up.

"'To the bad?' The words sound strange in the mouth of a man who imagines that he knows the world and judges what he sees in it without prejudice! Should I be worse than I am now if, in my poverty and misery, I had sold myself to protect my brother and sister, to keep my poor mother and my old grandfather from starving? The men who buy souls with their dirty, beastly money may be bad, but the poor, silly fools of girls who let themselves be bought certainly are not. They only grow bad by degrees, through other people's badness.

"But, as we are talking the matter over after all, let me tell you this. I did show more strength of character than I would have given myself credit for. I remained pure, although it was not made easy for me. Yes, I took money; but I gave nothing in return for it, not even a kiss! I used those disgust-

ing men's passions, made fools of them, and let them hope, without ever losing myself. It wasn't nice, I grant you; it was mean and wretched; but a man fighting for his life is allowed a good deal of latitude. I never saw the scenes which took place in the drawing-room, either; I always sat in the next room and put my fingers into my ears, so that I shouldn't be obliged even to hear anything.

"Well, Herr Demel, we've talked the matter over, and I bet that you won't trouble yourself any more about me and my miserable prospects. I know you have always been good and kind to me; I owe it to you and no one else that I am not disgraced to-day in the eyes of the whole world; but I cannot get over the pain you caused me that night."

She had controlled herself with difficulty, and could hold out no longer. She leant against the wall, buried her face in her hands and wept quietly. She was so immersed in her grief that she scarcely felt Demel put his arm about her and draw her gently to him.

"That's all nonsense, Grete! I was cruel to you because I loved you so much, and you are so angry with me only because you love me! And now everything is cleared up between us, and you are mine, and will always be mine!"

The girl's anger and bitterness had been swept away by his words. She was laughing through her

tears. Already she had leaned her head against his broad shoulders, and had forgotten all her past unhappiness. . . .

Otto drew the girl on to his knee.

"Before we go to your mother," he said, "we'll sketch our future life in broad outlines. I'm no millionaire, but I earn more than I need, and am well enough off to free you and your family from all material anxieties. An old uncle of mine has a little cottage at Hietzing with a big garden. He wants, in any case, to move to his old home in Tirol, and I'll buy the house from him. And away with all of you from this disgusting miserable alley! Away as quickly as possible, for here, in this alley, a dark shadow would always lie across our happiness. If all goes well, we can get married and move in in three or four weeks. And we will never set foot in this street again."

Grete rested her burning cheek against his face and looked straight before her, as though reflecting.

"And yet," she said, "I shall never forget the ugly, wretched Melchiorgasse! There is poverty there, and misery and baseness, and murder and other dreadful crimes; but there's love and kindness there as well! To me it has become a symbol—of the whole city, the whole world, the whole of life!"

THE END

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A girl with all the charm of the South bares her soul in a personal record, frank and unashamed. She was adopted by two brothers both of whom loved her. One of them was married. When she became ripe for a man, she faced an almost crushing conflict of feeling.

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Hollywood Gold

by Phyllis Gordon Demarest

Author of Children of Hollywood

YOU who know Hollywood will recognize the realness of this story. And you who do not know it must glimpse the glory — sometimes stained, sometimes fine—that is a very part of the film city. Each character has been drawn with a fine pen, each a representative type true to the Hollywood of today.

This widely-embracing novel is, first of all, the story of Eden. Eden who loved Terry O'Day and helped him to stardom, little dreaming that her unselfishness would only bring tragedy in its wake. But Julian Falcon, greatest of all directors, knew and warned her—too late. It was only after that that he came to play his big part in Eden's life, along with the loveliest star of the screen, Gay Maynard. . . .

"Hollywood Gold." Gold—that is the secret god trailing the destinies of those high and mighty, those insignificant and lowly connected with the film industry. How many lives does the great god ruin? How many does he illumine?

In this the only honest novel of Hollywood ever published, lies the answer.

Macaulay Publishers New York

"It's better to be mercenary than miserable," says

MEN MARRIAGE AND ME

by

PEGGY HOPKINS JOYCE

PEGGY JOYCE

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From the time she ran away from home for a stage career with a trick bicycle rider, she has reaped a lot of very human experience in the fields of men and marriage, women and love, money and pleasure.

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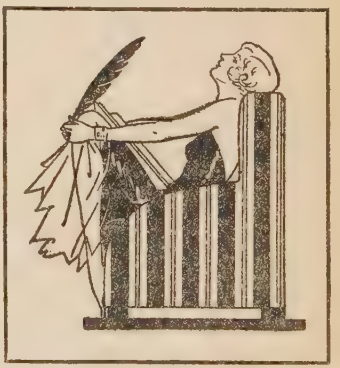

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